ACTION RESEARCH AS A WAY OF DOING THEOLOGY (ART): TRANSFORMING MY PRACTICE OF PREACHING THE BIBLE WITH MY CONGREGATION

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by Jason Clare Boyd

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Viviane

« Tel est mon bien-aimé, tel est mon ami »

Cantique des Cantiques 5:16 (La Bible Segond)

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ACTION RESEARCH AS A WAY OF DOING THEOLOGY (ART): TRANSFORMING MY PRACTICE OF PREACHING THE BIBLE WITH MY CONGREGATION

BY JASON CLARE BOYD

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores action research as a way of doing theology (ART). The contours of ART emerged through a collaborative inquiry into my practice of preaching the Bible within the context of congregational worship. It began with a niggling question, "What was happening in the communication space between me and my congregation?" An action research pilot project (March-April 2006) with Cumnock Congregational Church (Minister, 1998 - 2008) prepared the ground for a collaborative inquiry with Witney Congregational Church (Minister, 2009 - present). With the latter congregation we developed Word Café, an adaption of Brown and Isaacs World Café (2005), as a method of creating communicative space (Wicks & Reason, 2009) in which we explored our experience of what happened when I preached a sermon and examined what, if any changes, occurred during the period of November 2010 to July 2011.

This is ideographic research and as such engages in first and second person inquiry, weaving together the voices and insights of participants. In the first person I integrate my spiritual formation and academic development with my vocation as a preacher. In the second person I give an account of the way in which I entered into a collaborative relationship with my congregation to research my preaching practice and their experience of it.

I have constructed a narrative of a self-reflexive, critical examination of a single case (Gustavsen, 2003; Reason, 2003) of iterative cycles which encompass the process of co-planning and of the Word Café. My intention is to make a wider contribution to the practice of preaching by modelling ART as a dialogical, relational way of being, and to inspire other preachers and congregations to develop their own ways of reflecting on their practices and experiences of preaching the Bible in their own contexts.

Arising out of my inquiry into my preaching practice is the concept of ART which has the potential to create and nurture dialogical space in the exploration and transformation of various aspects of congregational life. This is a contextual, emergent, and interdisciplinary account shaped by narratives of learning. The actions we took in attempting to create communicative space yielded the themes of a fresh hearing of the Bible, listening with my eyes, and exploring my own insider-outsider positionality, in particular through narratives of wisdom and power, silence, and affections. Central to the practice of ART is the growth of the qualities necessary for being authentic as a practitioner-researcher. I set out to demonstrate the way in which the development of attentional practices increased my awareness as I navigated the insider-outsider positionality of a preacher and researcher.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AR - action research

ARCS - Action Research: Church & Society

ART - action research as a way of doing theology

NRSV - Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references come from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition).

PAR - Participatory Action Research

PJ - Process Journal

PPPM - Preaching Project Planning Meeting

PT - practical theology

R - Reflections - I wrote these following the Word Café, having completed transcriptions, thematisation, entries in my PJ both before and after watching the video.

SJ - Spiritual Journal

TAR - Theological Action Research

TARN - Theological Action Research Network

WS - Writing style (this refers to the way I identified clusters of writing that appeared to me to be in the same writing style as I transcribed the table clothes produced during each Word Café)

INTRODUCTION

I look back over what I've written and I know it's wrong, not because of what I've set down, but because of what I've omitted. What isn't there has a presence, like the absence of light... You want the truth, of course... The living bird is not labelled bones (2001, p. 484).

The question about 'what is going on when a sermon is preached' arose principally out of a desire for feedback from the congregation about their experience of my preaching. Whilst many other professions have systems in place to appraise effectiveness of practice, preachers intuit responses to their sermons from their own perceptions. Responses at the church door range from bland 'nice sermon' to engaged positive or negative comments. I wanted to know how I could tease out with my congregation how they saw and heard me in a sustained and systematic way. Do sermons - my sermons - change the way my congregation live?

Critical awareness of the motivations driving the questions and the research process is crucial (cf. Schlafer, 2004, pp. 137-139). Self-reflexivity necessarily begins with being visible in my research. Why is the research question important to me? Where does it come from? My basic epistemological assumption is that all knowing comes from somewhere. Does this approach risk unhealthy introspection and wild subjectivity? To what extent is it justified for the thesis to be a narrative of the messy, emergent quality of the research?

I shape a critical narrative of action research as a way of doing theology (ART). This approach emerged through a collaborative inquiry into my practice of preaching the Bible within the context of congregational worship. With my congregation we developed Word Café as a method of generating conversations in which we explored our experience of what happened when I preached a sermon and what if any change occurred during the period of November 2010 to July 2011. Word Café is an adaption of the World Café process propounded by Brown with Isaacs (2005) which taps into the common experience of talking over a cup of coffee as a way of wisdom sharing. Word Café was a particular approach which enabled us to attend to the experience of my preaching in a particular context.

It is important to establish at the outset that this is an emic (insider/subjective) inquiry. I am intentional in choosing to resist a set of conclusions which could be construed as a set of universal principles (etic - outsider/objective). The contextual nature of this research is captured by Coghlan (2013, p. 335) when he notes that, "One of the particular characteristics of practical knowing is that it varies from place

to place and from situation to situation. What works in one setting may not work in another. Accordingly, what we know needs to be differentiated for each specific situation in which we find ourselves." In delineating the features of ART I am not proposing a McDonalds style recipe which, if followed, will replicate a good experience of the sermon for all preachers and congregations. This is not to say that this ART project does not have a wider contribution to make. My purpose is to model a way of being which may inspire other preachers and congregations to develop their own ways of reflecting on their practices and experiences of preaching in their own contexts.

There are a couple of qualifications to make. First, though I planned and implemented the research with my congregation and I made my written reflections on the data available from participant feedback, the story I tell in this thesis is my own. When I refer to 'my' research/inquiry I recognise that this research/inquiry would not have been possible if my congregation had not shared my question(s) and participated in the planning and execution of the project. I intend in my use of 'my' research to convey the way in which this was 'our' research.

Second, initiating and entering into this research process had an emergent quality which will be reflected in my writing. The process of putting my discoveries into words has been in itself integral to the inquiry and has generated knowledge (D. M. Adams, 2011, pp. 65-71; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 146; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003, p. 168; Mellor, 2001, pp. 468, 471).

The quotation heading my introduction comes from Iris, the protagonist in *The Blind Assassin* (Atwood, 2001). Having kept silent about the events surrounding her sister's death and her part in it, she writes her story and leaves it in the hope that one day her estranged granddaughter will read it. She imagines that writing the truth would be possible if you thought no one would read it: "You must see the writing as emerging like a long scroll of ink from the index finger of your right hand; you must see your left hand erasing it. Impossible of course" (2001, p. 345). Iris comes to realise that the omissions are often more important than the "labelled bones" or the tidy script. This is my dilemma too. I attempt to tell the truth knowing that you are reading. How do I write of a living inquiry that goes beyond the bare bones of what might appear to be 'facts'? There are so many different ways that the story of this inquiry could have been written. The measure of the truthfulness of my account is in

being explicit that there is much more to this inquiry than what I have set down on paper.

A third critical issue is to do with the way in which the writing of this story engages with and extends the literature. I have opted for the priority of the participant voices over that of the literature to mitigate the tendency of the dominance of the discourse of academic expertise. This runs against what action researcher Marshall (2008, p. 684 referring to Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) contends is "...conventional academic scholarship, which seems impervious to any crises of representation and legitimacy, much form communicates a deadening and suppression of voice, depersonalization, acquiescence to norms." She asserts that essential to writing AR is what she describes as "grounded form" and the idea that "...form should be congruent with content" (2008, p. 688). This is not the pursuit of an objective account of the world but rather an articulation of our experience of the world we are seeking to know. Discovering the right form in writing ensures resonance with "...voices that matter, one's own and those of co-inquirers" (2008, p. 689). Guba and Lincoln (2005, p. 207) identify that the "Omission of stakeholder or participant voices reflects, we believe, a form of bias." Their concern with the "bias" of the absent or suppressed voice is not a positivist concern. Instead, it is about a principle of "fairness" (2005, p. 207). In this thesis, my own voice and that of co-participants in the research will be heard in a conversation with the literature which will help to shape a theoretical framework for understanding this subjective, highly contextualised narrative of our experience of preaching.

The inquiry was driven by the cycles of action inquiry in conversation with the literature which in turn is adding another voice to the literature itself. Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 84) stress that "...data analysis is pushed by relevant literature and that the literature should be extended through the contribution of this action research." The generation of "local knowledge and practice" (2005, p. 84) involves the cut and thrust of the wider academic disciplines. My inquiry has increased awareness and stimulated context specific change in my practice of preaching the Bible within the community of my congregation. I will demonstrate that my inquiry has been set within a dynamic dialogue with the literature and to add my own unique voice to it.

Fourth, the way in which I write this account is entirely consistent with AR which has often been described as being messy. From conception to implementation

my inquiry has not been linear. It has been a twisting road in which I have met the familiar and the strange around the bend and adjusted my manner of travelling. As I have wended my way in the research journey, in my conversation with the literature I have privileged the narrative which in turn has shaped the thesis.

The messiness of action inquiry is due to the reality that we do not work with humans in perfect laboratory conditions but in the topsy turvy world (Ladkin, 2004, p. 547). Snoeren *et al.* (2012, pp. 201-202) "...think it is time that participatory research is represented in a more honest way. The messiness of participatory research should not be polished into nice smooth paragraphs...Let us be honest and vulnerable about our wrestling and searching, struggling and striving, because there are no easy answers."

Recognition of the raggedness of research is not limited to AR. Ethnographer, Ward (2004, p. 125), concurs with Skeggs (1995) in her repeated refrain "...doing ethnography is messy business." The messiness arises out of research that "...is not easily quantifiable..." and which relies on qualitative data (2004, p. 125). She maintains that the ethnographer's main tool is writing down their experiences of living from within the research field. It is essential for this to be "plausible" in advancing the understanding of those reading the research. Ward acknowledges that the process "...can be fraught and complex, and is often an emotionally charged process..." (2004, p. 125). However, Ward's assessment of ethnographic process highlights a divergence from AR when she maintains that this personal process "...is rendered invisible in the neat and polished final text" (2004, pp. 125-126). This 'final text' smoothes out the wrinkles of power relations and the insider-outsider positionality of those being studied and of the researcher (2004, p. 126).

AR opposes this erasure of the researcher and the obscuring of questions of power and position. At stake is a necessary transparency in exposing the involvement and influence of the researcher in relation to those with whom they are researching. Mellor (2001, p. 479) probes towards the idea that perhaps such a "Full description of the 'faltering reality' of research or practice, presented as part of an 'honesty trail', may contribute to that sense of 'resonance'...." So whilst I affirm Ward's identification of the messiness of ethnographic research within congregational life, I would want to argue that the 'I' of the action researcher must be made visible in the writing up of what has been discovered.

Fisher and Phelps (2006, p. 150) incisively contrast the metaphors of the thesis as recipe (traditional five chapters) or performing art (emergent and messy) through modelling their article as a drama. They insist that

> This requires the researcher to account for the way in which the research both shapes and is shaped by them, not just because they conduct it, but because they *are* it (Sumara & Carson, 1997). Epistemologically it is not consistent to write a text which does not bear the traces of its author (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

They argue for a "presentational form" not as a universal norm but as a legitimate approach for writing AR (2006, pp. 144-145, 160). There are risks with such theses: overemphasis on narrative leading to wordiness; springing new concepts late on; and "...students over-identify with their own stories and indulge in too much 'confessional narrative'..." thus failing to "...distinguish between authentic inquiry and...indulgent navel gazing" (2006, p. 160). As Ladkin (2004, p. 545) points out, there is "...something of a tension between the researcher's experience of the process as being cyclical, unplanned, punctuated by flashes of insight - 'messy' - and the expectations and needs of the reading audience that arguments be linear and clear, that conclusions should be reached." The search for "form" and "transparency" in the writing up process is integral to the action inquiry process and is a key challenge which requires careful attention and making explicit choices (2004, pp. 545-547). This thesis is 'performing art'.

Fifth, 'I' will figure explicitly in the writing. This 'I' is in direct relation to 'we' as I weave 'my story'/'our story' critically, writing 'us' into a narrative (cf. Walton, 2007, 2009). With Reason and Bradbury (2008b, p. 6) I consider that first-person practice is "a foundational practice" to second and third person AR (cf. Coghlan, 2013). Referring to Chandler and Torbert (2003), Brydon-Miller (2008, p. 204) is adamant that "Prior to entering a research setting of any kind...we might begin with a critical examination of ourselves as individual researchers using a first-person action research approach." Why am I a preacher? Why does it matter whether my practice of preaching connects and communicates? Are there hints in my story that will illuminate these questions? What will I discover about myself as I write?

In the practice of ART there is no neutral or objective vantage point from which to give a definitive analysis of the 'facts'. It is essential for the practitioner-researcher to be rendered visible. Integral to AR is self-reflexivity made apparent in

every stage of the inquiry including the manner of presentation. Graham (2013b, p. 150) notes that "This level of self-revelation is rare in most academic literature, even examples of research that aim to work collaboratively and sensitively with research subjects." PT shares AR's commitment to context and *praxis*. The challenge of AR to PT is for the practical theologian to be written onto the page.

PT is in good company with mainstream academia. Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 69) are adamant that, "Whilst it is not uncommon for academics to leave themselves off the page in terms of the personal origins and impact of the research..." obscurity is not an option in AR. Moore (2007, p. 38; based on Rosen, 1991) models the transparent involved action researcher in his write up incisively commenting: "I do not expect academic journals to turn their backs on traditional forms of writing, but there are still disproportionate numbers of articles published about ethnographic theory, rather than actual accounts of ethnographic experience." Indeed Reason and Marshall (2006, p. 315) posit that the foundation of good AR involves "the *personal process* of inquiry." The salient issue is that ART challenges PT to learn from AR and face the dilemma of being on the page without falling into narcissism. Building on Graham (2013b, p. 150) I would argue that it is not an option for the practical theologian to airbrush themselves out of the research write up.

The reluctance to being rendered visible is apparent in the contextual theologies of Hodgson (1994) and Adams (2010). Hodgson (1994, p. 332) wrestles with the critique of Taylor who "...wondered why it is that I and others like me tend to avoid the sort of 'self-implicating or self-involving discourse' that would counter the illusion of speaking from an elevated plateau and might reveal something of the author's social location." Taylor suggests hiding behind the text may be driven by deference to the idea of objectivity or a fear of falling into self-indulgent individualism. Hodgson (p. 332) responds that it is, "Probably both of these, together with a wariness about exposing one's vulnerabilities." He proceeds to take the risk, though tentatively in an 'afterword' rather than as an integral part of his theology. Similarly, in his contextual Christology Adams (2010, pp. 6-8) is visible in relation to his research question in a brief section in his opening chapter. Then he disappears in the remainder of his work. There is a growing recognition of the necessity of the embeddedness of the theological task and yet the dominant and acceptable discourse of remote academe muffles the embodied voices.

In Graham's (2002, pp. 9, 96 italics original) "*turn to practice*" she builds on Haraway's concept of "*situated knowledge*" which "...deploy the dialectic of *disclosure* and *foreclosure*." Swinton and Mowat (2006) argue that reflexivity is essential to qualitative research at every stage of the research from the formulation of the question, to the methods chosen, and in the written presentation. "Reflexivity is a mode of knowing which accepts the impossibility of the researcher standing outside of the research field and seeks to incorporate that knowledge creatively and effectively" (2006, p. 59). They note Willig's delineation of two aspects of reflexivity: personal and epistemological. Personal reflexivity points towards the autobiographical nature of all research whilst the epistemological aspect engages the hermeneutic of suspicion, critically questioning every aspect of the inquiry (Willig, 2001, p. 10 in Swinton & Mowatt, pp. 59-60). Though there are glimpses of Graham (2009) in *Words Made Flesh* on the whole she tends to be hidden. The same could be said of Swinton & Mowat (2006).

Being visible is easier said than done. In this thesis I have wrestled with my identity. I have been named and re-named, filled with fear and renewed in faith.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 identifies the embryonic beginnings of my inquiry. I set the stage in searching for a definition of AR beginning with the narrative of our local definition. This leads into a survey of AR literature and, having mapped the territory, Chapter 2 sketches the outline of ART. I set the context by telling my story as colours being placed on the ART pallet. I go on to analyse practical theologians who engage directly with AR. Drawing upon the insights of the spirituality of action researcher Coghlan, I identify in Graham and Reader sources for negotiating the boundaries between PT and AR.

Chapter 3 offers the rationale for the method of Word Café as communicative space. I outline the principles underpinning the conversations followed by explaining the process of facilitating Word Café events. I give attention to Kemmis' interpretation of Habermas' concept of communicative action. I evaluate the extent to which Word Café opened up communicative space using the phases of inclusion, control and intimacy identified by Wicks and Reason as essential to the process.

Chapter 4 centres on a hearing of Luke 24:13-35 ('Emmaus Road'). I consider the use of the Bible both in PT and my own spirituality. Critically

reflecting on my aural encounter I explore several themes suggestive of the interpenetration of ART.

Chapter 5 explores a pivotal insight gained in the inquiry. The discovery that I was not looking the congregation in the eye when I preached is explored in terms of spiritual attention. I unpack the phrase 'listen with your eyes' as a whole body experience which necessarily requires confronting vulnerabilities.

Chapter 6 argues for the importance of visibility for the involved researcher. The narrative of finding a place to stand before my congregation leads into a discussion of Herr and Anderson's insider-outsider continuum. In particular I identify that making visible the relations of power and knowledge is crucial.

Chapter 7 constitutes the conclusion that is not a conclusion. I focus on three themes salient to finding a way in negotiating insider-outsider relations. The learning narratives demonstrate how I grapple with power and wisdom, silence and feelings in collaboration with my congregation. These are snapshots capturing particular insights and continue to call for further action and reflection. It is a story without an ending.

Final words are from participants in their own voices: those who read my thesis and those who took part in a celebration of Word Café on 22 March 2015. This is albeit a brief attempt to demonstrate the collaboration and ownership of the inquiry right through to the point of submitting the thesis. It is indicative of the ongoing nature of the dialogue.

Note that all quotations from participants in my data sources have been reproduced without 'correction'.

Interlude

...The process of being an 'involved' researcher from time to time produces an incredible emotional response. Today has been such a day (25.05.2012).

First of all, I hesitated to write myself into my research. I put it off until after lunch. Then I sat for almost an hour. I wrote a phrase. Then I deleted it. Wrote again. Then deleted. And so on...

It reminded me of my experience of doing a fire walk. I remember sitting at the kitchen table breathing heavily and feeling utterly sick. I told Viviane that I simply couldn't do it. If only I would break a leg or suddenly become ill. Then I wouldn't have to face the impossible. How can a person walk on a bed of glowing embers?

When I finally dragged myself out to the event I was like a man facing the death sentence (though never having faced this I suppose I cannot know for sure - hyperbole I guess). It was only my ego that kept me from making my excuses and going home. I was driven on by the need to save face before my Anglican and Methodist colleagues. I couldn't bottle it at this crucial juncture. Could I?
Our facilitator used the 'F' word in a way that would normally have caused offence. Somehow his choice language didn't concern me one bit. The thought of what lay ahead was enough to cause me to consider uttering the same profanities (though I was too scared to form the words)!

Part of the process involved participants going to the site of the fire walk. The wood was piled high and bathed in flammable material. We were made to walk the unlit distance - to pace ourselves - to imagine success at the sight of what appeared to be certain failure. Then like those staring at one who is dying and knowing that this is the inevitable end, we gazed at the pyre and watched the flames consume it. Tongues of fire leapt high. I couldn't believe the madness of what I was about to do!

I'd signed consent forms which presumably let the fire walking company out of any responsibility for my injuries. The ink was on the form. I looked my Methodist colleague in the eye. He was sixty odd. I was thirty odd. He was confident. I felt like soiling myself. Pride was the only thing that held me to this moment.

We walked down to the smouldering path with purpose. There was no turning back. This event was surrounded by townspeople in the Market Square. My

children were watching. Members of my congregation were watching. The event was being filmed (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IVQhEZr2u0 at 1 minute and 28 seconds).

The instruction was clear. Step onto the turf of grass. The facilitator who'd been swearing like a sergeant leaned into my face and screamed "What's your name?" and I shouted back, "Jason!!!!!" and stepped onto soft warm velvet striding forward to the end uninjured.

"What's your name?" and the academic in me screams, "It's none of your business!" But I know that the objective observer, the researcher who has no vantage point - no roots - no context - is a phantom of positivism.

"What's your name?" and the human in me screams, "I don't know!!!!!" and steps into a world of writing myself into existence. And as I write I am moved to tears with the memory of praying at my mother's knee to ask Jesus into my heart. The force of seeing myself hits me as I recognise that preaching and being a preacher has been my identity since my early memories. I am bewildered as I write that I cannot imagine life without being a preacher. Is there not more to me than this?

I step onto the heat of embers to stride towards discovering my name. I do know this: what I already know and what is yet to be discovered is embodied in God who names me.

CHAPTER 1

ACTION RESEARCH: A MESSY BUSINESS

There's science and there's science, is all I'm saying. When humans are the subjects, it's mostly not science (Fowler, 2014, p. 272).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains three broad sections. First, I begin by telling the story of how my research question emerged and how in an effort to answer it I discovered AR. Second, I search for a definition of AR. I grapple with the very nature of AR beginning with the definition used to introduce the congregation to the concept. Following the trail of the narrative of this local definition, I unpack a number of AR themes. Third, I give a historical overview of AR and delineate its various strands, with particular attention to its epistemological framework. This, in turn, will lead into a consideration of various approaches to AR.

EMERGENCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The embryonic stage of forming my inquiry correlates with Coghlan and Brannick's (2010, p. 144) observation that "...in action research you typically start out with a fuzzy question, are fuzzy about your methodology in the initial stages and have fuzzy answers in the early stages. As the project develops, your methods and answers become less fuzzy and so your questions become less fuzzy." This is in the context of their argument that due to the emergent nature of AR, there is an increased burden on the researcher to demonstrate rigour and quality by making research processes transparent and defending the choices made (cf. Zubber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007, p. 431). Reason and Bradbury (2006c, p. xxix) regard explicit choice making as "...the primary 'rule' in action research practice." My purpose in this section is to recount the blurry beginnings of what I sought to interrogate as I moved towards greater clarity. Throughout I critique the choices made as my inquiry unfolded.

My question first formed in a seminar at the outset of a post-graduate programme. Though the thesis was some way off we were asked to put into words an area of ministry that we would like to research. I recall that I had no hesitation as I explained that I wanted to understand what happened when a sermon was preached. What was going on in that space between the preacher and the congregation? Why

did people hear what I was sure I never said and why did others fail to hear what I intended them to hear? How did I know if I was communicating effectively and whether or not the sermon changed anything? One person joked that I was trying to research the work of the Holy Spirit.

My questions arose out of a decade of preaching on a weekly basis and wondering whether or not I was an effectual communicator. I attempted to measure quality by reading my sermons to Viviane (my wife) and taking into account her suggestions and criticisms. Then after the service I would ask her how she felt I had preached. I valued this feedback even though I recognised that she could not represent the perspectives of the whole congregation.

My inquiry is set against the background of four jolting responses to sermons I have preached. One was a positive experience following a sermon when a group of about a dozen people huddled at the church door engaging in a discussion with me. This dialogue was exciting and I wondered how it had happened and whether there was a way I could encourage it.

The other three responses were intensely negative and had profound consequences for the quality of my pastoral relationships with the persons concerned. I will not recount the specific details of the incidents in order to protect the identity of those involved. The first experience took place early on in my ministry. It is my present judgement that at that time my preaching had a dogmatic tone. I had been advocating a particular moral stance with which one person strongly disagreed. Their voice rose as they argued their case. I lost my temper and shouted, "Do not speak to me like this. I'm your minister!" In the second and third incidents the sermon was interpreted through the lens of each hearer's experience. They both heard the sermon in a way that I had not intended and were deeply offended. Despite dialogue and attempts to reconcile, the two pastoral relationships were permanently scarred. The manner in which I have told these stories cannot convey the distress of these experiences of preaching. Even now the memory of them sends a shudder through me and fills me with regret. Each instance was marked by my self-assuredness and lack of awareness of the impact of my words on the people who heard them. Running through each situation was the question of my own authority as a preacher and my powerlessness to ensure that people heard and understood what I had intended to communicate.

Following the first tentative forming of my question at that post-graduate seminar, I encountered AR. I was transformed in my thinking through reading Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, p. 138) and in particular a story he told in connection with "renouncing" myths. A coordinator for a group called "Full Circle" presented a group with a picture of a rubbish heap on a street corner, the very street they were meeting on. A participant identified the location of the image as Africa or Latin America. When the coordinator asked why it could not be in New York the response revealed the myth: "Because we are the United States and that can't happen here" (1970, p. 138). The Freirian concept of conscientization coincided with my introduction to Argyris and Schon's (in Dick & Dalmau, 2000) concept of espoused theories and theories in practice. My own research question required the exploding of my own 'myths': the gap between my espoused and practised theology of preaching. It was through a postgraduate AR module that I took the opportunity to explore my question. In a pilot project I invited people from my congregation at that time to form a focus group.[1] The pilot project gave me an opportunity to do AR and develop towards a more authentic practice.

On the cusp of the research co-planning meetings with my present congregation in Witney, I sought to give definition to the exact nature of what I wanted to know about what happened in the space between the preacher and the congregation when a sermon is preached.

> One of the main drivers behind this exploration is to become a better practitioner of preaching. I want to have a greater understanding of what I think I'm doing and what I'm actually doing. I want to know how my congregation is hearing the words I'm speaking and how they perceive what I say in relation to what I do. It is important for me to assess the level of integrity between actions and words, words and actions. I am interested in exploring how the sermon is understood and whether it seems to make any difference in my life and the lives of hearers, even if it is only a perceived difference. In other words, is preaching transformative? (Boyd, 2013, p. 86)

This inquiry began with a concern to improve my practice of preaching and to understand the congregation's experience of my preaching. The adoption of the AR orientation pushed me beyond this initial concern towards the possibilities that AR opened up for 'doing theology' in all aspects of Christian practices. It is true that my

[1] I was minister of Cumnock Congregational Church, Scotland (www.cumnockcongregationalchurch.com) and conducted the pilot study from March-April 2006.

preaching practice was challenged and transformed. Yet it was the way in which the AR process through the method of Word Café created a space for God talk that related the preaching/worship/life nexus and opened up possibilities for the whole of congregational life. My initial concern with improved practice and transformation resonated with AR and opened up vistas of theological possibility.

DEFINING ACTION RESEARCH

In this section I begin with an overview of the complexity of defining action research. In keeping with the ethos the AR approach of contextualised knowledge generation, I focus on and critique the way in which I collaborated with my congregation in a local definition. Through the data in my journal and the transcriptions of the co-planning meetings, I identify themes ripe for dialogue with the literature. Having shaped a definition of AR from the ground up, I give a historical overview and identify the main streams within the discipline.

The Elusive Definition

AR eludes a concise definition. This is captured in Ladkin's (2004, p. 536) observation that "Even a cursory review of the literature reveals little agreement on a sole definition for research methods which claim the label of action research." She recognises the challenge of pinning down AR and yet maintains that definitions are "...helpful as starting points..." (2004, p. 537). She distils two qualities of AR based on McKernan's definition: the practical and the claim to be scientific, asserting that his definition encompasses a process of "cycles of inquiry" (2004, p. 537).

Eikeland (2007a, p. 345) concurs when he succinctly asserts "...that action research is far from being an unambiguous concept or practice. For novices, the field of action research is bewildering." With Ladkin he does not think that this difficulty should deter us from attempting to define AR so long as we recognise that however we articulate it, it will be partial and provisional. He identifies that a key characteristic of AR is that it is located within a web of practical knowing, what he refers to as "...the 60 years of 'turning to practice'..." (2007a, p. 345).

Reason and Bradbury (2006c, p. xxii), both active in drawing together the many and varied strands of AR through their two handbooks, capture its diversity by describing it "...as a 'family of approaches'...". In the conclusion of the second edition they reiterate the image of a family of approaches and go on to emphasise

that "...action research is a complex living process which cannot be tied to definitions. Action research is far more a work of art than a set of procedures..." (2008a, p. 698). So although AR defies a neat definition "*...quality in inquiry comes from awareness of and transparency about the choices open to you and that you make at each stage of the inquiry*" (2008a, p. 698, italics original) .

The difficulty of defining AR is not a unique problem. Hillon and Boje (2007, p. 360) stress that AR shares "...the same type of vagueness that characterizes the label qualitative research." The family of approaches frequently engages in debate over the nature of AR. They note that despite "semantic" differences action researchers are not prevented from working together. Crucially they identify quantitative and qualitative research as "the false dichotomy" which AR has attempted to bridge. They hit upon what I regard to be the key aim of this orientation which is to "...address the simple pragmatic question of 'What works?' Thus, we cannot take the positivist's easy path to restrict arbitrarily the field of objective inquiry, nor can we drift to the subjective extremes of constructivist-interpretist approaches" (2007, p. 360). The question "What works?" holds together differing positionalities (outsider/insider) and ways of knowing (objective/subjective) refusing a division between theory and practice. We will return to a consideration of "What works?" after giving consideration to the development of a definition in collaboration with my congregation.

Finding a local definition

In working towards a definition I return to the presentation I made to the Church Meeting of Witney Congregational Church on Tuesday, 16 March 2010. In the Congregational Way, the Church Meeting consists of all members of the local Church and is the ultimate decision making body. I sought permission from the previous Church Meeting to make a presentation on the research I hoped to conduct with the congregation. The purpose of the presentation was to be explicit about the questions I wanted to explore, to explain my theological presuppositions, and to define AR. The presentation was dialogical and culminated in the decision by the Church Meeting to allow the research to take place. I used the presentation slides at subsequent co-planning meetings as a springboard for discussion.

Crucial to the Church Meeting and the co-planning meetings was introducing the congregation to the concept of AR. This presented me with the challenge of a

definition. Bearing in mind that my own understanding of AR was still evolving, I was not aware that anyone in the congregation had any working knowledge of it (though two deacons had been involved in World Café processes in their work places). My exposure to AR had been in an academic setting and I had to find a way of introducing the idea to those who did not have this kind of background. Defining AR involved the meeting of two 'cultures'. As part of an overall presentation were two slides offering a definition:

These were not intended to provide an exhaustive definition but to give shape to the contours of AR and stimulate the beginnings of engagement.

These bullet points served the task of building a bridge from my own understanding of AR to my congregation, unfamiliar with the approach. Altrichter *et al.* (2002) highlight the predominant western origins of AR and the challenges that are faced when action researchers collaborate with "indigenous cultures". They point out "...how the western action researcher who, at the beginning of a project, is usually more experienced with research strategies and techniques than other participants, must be prepared to 'give away' or share their knowledge of action research, which is anyway what action research advocates as part of the collaborative research process" (2002, p. 126). The article contrasts McTaggart's cross-cultural approach with Holly's idea of the "meeting of cultures" in which culture is not principally about ethnicity but "different systems of thought and action developed in relatively unrelated places within one society" (2002, p. 127). Though these remarks refer to the dramatic interface between AR and non-western cultures, they are pertinent to the action researcher who is co-researching in Western contexts with those who are not familiar with AR. It is crucial to collaborate and find a definition that does not alienate. They seem to be suggesting definitions that are collaborative,

"...incremental rather than normative" (2002, p. 126). Those researchers who tend towards purist definitions may describe such research as being "'non-action research' or 'limited versions of action research'" (2002, p. 127). Holly (quoted in 2002, p. 127) dissents from this rigidity and proffers that "...too purist a definition (of action research) is disenfranchising." Thus any definition of AR must be contextualised, open and flexible. A definition serves the real life situation and its value may be measured by the values of inclusion and liberation.

Arising out of Feyerbend's work, Altrichter (2002) offers a diptych style definition: axiomatic (the meaning of the phrase AR) and empirical (measures of what makes good AR). What does action research mean? First, it is self-reflection and improvement of practice. Second, it is weaving together action-reflection. Finally, it is stepping into the public sphere with action-reflection on practices held in common with others. How do we know we are doing AR well? It is essentially democratic and must be thoroughgoing first in enabling full participation and second in leading to the liberation of all. Third, it is essential that the methods are tested in pilot situations similar to the context in which they will be implemented to ensure that data gathering will 'work'. Finally, AR is authentically collaborative when it engenders long term ownership of the research data.

A concrete example of my congregation owning the research project occurred when I experienced a significant crisis in writing up my research and I felt unable to carry on. I shared what I was contemplating with my appraisal group and then the diaconate (PJ, 5.12.2012). I was urged on and given a month of study leave in January 2013. Later, the Church Meeting gave me nine weeks paid study leave combined with three weeks of my annual leave. This three month block provided me with the necessary space to focus on writing. It was an enormous affirmation that the inquiry mattered to the Church.

In summary, for Altricher *et al.* (2002, pp. 128-129) the axiomatic is "participation" and "emancipation" and the empirical is "democratic context" and "ownership". The empirical qualities of AR are not prescriptive but indicative and are essentially tested and developed in the research context. They acknowledge that placing participation and emancipation in the empirical part of the definition leaves them vulnerable to the criticism of being "tautological". However, earlier in the paper they assert that "Part of doing research is researching research, as the research task is inherently epistemic" (2002, p. 128). For them the epistemic criteria of

democracy and ownership are the outworking of the axiomatic participation and emancipation and thus an appropriate focus of research.

In preparation for the Church Meeting I had to make choices about how I was going to 'give away' my understanding of action-reflection. My other concern was to receive the insights of the congregation and allow these to reconfigure my definition. In my process journal, I record the dilemmas with which I wrestled as I prepared for the meeting. This entry is looking back at the meeting that had taken place the previous evening. My purpose in placing it here is to recall and critically analyse the way in which I was grappling with action research as a practice and a methodological approach to knowledge generation.

> ...For me it was the taking of the first step in the actual engagement in dialogue. A big part of me wants to study a 'pure' subject. If I could read a few books, analyse and write-up my work as an individual exercise I would feel less vulnerable. The kind of research I'm entering into with my congregation has the potential for being messy (this is not necessarily a negative thing). The messiness is all the bits I can't control. The messiness is about the complexity of the whole experience of a sermon.
>
> I also feared that my questions were not their questions, that my proposed plan would not resonate with them, and that they would withdraw from the intensity of participation. Would they be willing to give the time and energy to explore things? Would they be courageous enough to ask their own questions and bring their own ideas to the planning?
>
> Then I wondered how I should use this hour. Should I make a presentation? Should it be purely discussion based? If it was a presentation would they feel overwhelmed by my 'expertise' and perhaps silenced? If it was a discussion with nothing visual would the dialogue stall? Would they grasp what I was on about if there was no input?
>
> I made a choice. I decided to prepare a power point presentation in which I described what I thought this project was about. I set out to talk about what I thought theology was and what AR was and why AR was a useful tool in doing theology. I made it clear that the questions/plans I was setting out were to be met with their questions/plans. I decided that the power point would be a starting point for discussion but not the focus.
>
> I had the church arranged in a semi-circle so that everyone could see either screen. At the beginning of the meeting I explained that the arrangement of the chairs was to encourage everyone to be involved in the conversation (PJ, 17.03.2010).

This entry raises a number of choice points that I made in order to act with integrity towards the AR orientation. These raise a number of theoretical issues that

I explore in terms of the literature. First, I examine how I strove to ensure the research was a collaborative process. Second, I critique the nature of the starting point for the conversation. Third, in considering my desire for a 'pure' subject, I consider the interdisciplinary nature of AR. This will lead into a fourth section in which I consider the dominance of conventional science through the narrative of my own research process. Then I return to the working definition I offered to the Church Meeting.

We're all in this together

The concerns I express in my entry with shared questions, levels of commitment, and how to make the presentation both in terms of content and layout of the meeting space may be construed as being entirely to do with method. The question arises as to whether discussion of such 'methods' have any place in terms of wider theoretical concerns within the literature. At stake in the choice of methods is my vision of who I am in relation to those involved in the research. The way I see the world fundamentally shapes the research task.

However, it is important to be explicit that my impulse towards collaboration began before I knew anything about AR or its democratic imperative. Before AR came Congregationalism. As an ideal this form of ecclesiology is often construed as 'democratic' because authority rests with the Church Meeting which consists of every member of the congregation. A more accurate 'theological' articulation would speak of the Congregational Way as a Christocracy in which every member covenants one with another to seek the mind of Christ. This contrasted with my previous denominational background (Church of the Nazarene) in which ultimate authority regarding matters of faith and Church government rested with a general assembly, though the local congregation had considerable autonomy.

It was this coincidence of ecclesiology with the AR orientation that invited me to see the world differently, particularly my relationship to God and other people. My 'methods' arose from this world view of collaboration. With others I wanted to find out whether my questions mattered to them and design a way of exploring my practice with them. My method of presentation and the physical layout of the room were intentional choices aimed at expressing Congregational and AR values.

Core to my approach from the outset was the belief "...that good research is research conducted *with* people rather than *on* people" (Heron & Reason, 2006, p.

144). My aspiration was that my choice of methods would be consistent with the methodological commitment to be an involved vulnerable researcher rather than as detached expert (cf. McKay & Marshall, 2001). Authenticity is the integration of theory and practice making explicit the process of getting it wrong and doing it right (cf. Fisher & Phelps, 2006, p. 211; M. Stringer, 2004).

Is this a slipshod approach to research? Mellor (2001, italics original) insists that though trial and error is a necessity it is not "*...an excuse for 'sloppy' work (or sloppy analysis)*." Wicks *et al.* (2008, p. 26) suggest "...that action researchers themselves could be understood to have been acting as 'bricoleurs' over time, and in a very real sense, 'making the road while walking'." Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 69) offer a contrasting image of "designing the plane while flying it". My thesis shows the process of learning to choose methods that were appropriate to the AR orientation. This necessarily involved continuous reflexivity in which my practice was being scrutinised by my engagement with the literature and other AR practitioners.

Prior to my encounter with PT and AR I would have treated the terms method and methodology as essentially synonymous. This is a common conflation. In practical theology I became conscious of the distinction between method and methodology through the work of Cartledge (2003) and Swinton and Mowat (2006). Method refers to specific procedures for data collection and analysis and methodology relates to the philosophical paradigm, specifically our ontology and epistemology. This distinction is not a unique discussion within PT and AR and is shared with other disciplines.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 144) similarly express the relation between the terms: "Methodology is your philosophical approach; methods describe what you actually did" (cf. Ison, 2008, pp. 155-156). Dick (1999) augments the discussion by distinguishing between paradigm (e.g. AR), methodology (e.g. particular stream of AR) and method (techniques such as interviewing). Notably he does not offer any justification for the distinction between paradigm and methodology. Though his categorisation aids in differentiating between the overarching disciplines and the various strands within them, the subordination of methodology to paradigmatic conceptions does not seem sufficiently warranted. Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 50) offer an integrated approach to AR in which a researcher's methodology arises from their ontology and epistemology. Ontology

and epistemology seem to express the paradigmatic - not as overarching - but as foundational to methodology and methods.

Reason and Bradbury attempt what might be viewed as a more holistic understanding of methodology. For them AR is an all-encompassing paradigm that shapes every aspect of the researcher's life. The scope of AR is less a methodology and more an "*orientation to inquiry*" (2006c; 2008b, p. 1, italics original). 'Orientation' nuances the nature of AR methodology, conveying the idea of direction and evoking the metaphor of journey. It circumvents any bounded conceptualisation of methodology as principally theoretical. An orientation suggests not only a way of *seeing* the world (theoretical/philosophical) but of *being* in the world. It conjures up the image of an embodied being moving in a particular direction in the company of others.

A distinctive approach to method and methodology comes from what appears to be a minority voice in AR. Eikeland (2001), in a dense argument based on his assessment of Aristotle, argues that AR is the forgotten method ("hidden curriculum" of mainstream methodology). He radically conceives of the discipline of methodology as emerging from its vocational practice. Its "...traditional division of vocational training, between theory (methodological rules) and practice (the performance of research)" is untenable because it is their experience of research that "...legitimizes for them this or that research procedure" (2001, p. 153). It appears that Eikeland is contending that a methodology cannot exist from nowhere - ontologically existent apart from experience. Methodology is grounded in the practices of research communities who critically assess what works and what does not work. "Methodology, then, is knowledge developed 'inside-out', 'bottom-up' by practitioners within a certain community of practice..." and does not come from a detached outsider position (2007b, pp. 51-52). The inextricable relationship between method and methodology bound together in practice is a profound paradigmatic stance.

My PJ entry (17.03.2010) indicates I am wrestling with issues of 'method'. The choices I made were informed by my dialogue with AR literature (and to a lesser extent empirical research in PT) and arose out of methodological considerations. My theoretical engagement with the AR orientation in the lead up to the co-planning meetings and Word Café had instilled egalitarian values. My research was going to be *with* rather than *on* people about issues that were of mutual concern (Heron &

Reason, 2006, p. 144). My pedagogy would be of "teacher/student with students/teachers" (Freire, 1970, p. 61). These ideals of mutual inquiry were the aspirations for the Church Meeting which I wanted to embody in the content and physical context of the presentation. Though I did not encounter Eikeland's (2001, p. 151, 2006b, pp. 18-19, 45-49, 2007a, p. 352, 2012, pp. 29-31) theoretical work until after I had completed the Word Café cycles, his concept of "skhole" as a "free space for reflection and dialogue" resonated with what I was seeking to create with the congregation. This is an example of how my methodology-methods were framed and re-framed by the literature.

Looking back at my reflection, I perceive a gap between my espoused theory of collaboration and my theory in action. The decision I took to prepare a power point presentation which delineated my own perspective on theology, AR and the design of the research project reveals my governing value of staying in control. I did not want to be exposed for having a limited knowledge of AR. I also feared that the discussion would be met with silence or would collapse. I am not contending that preparing a presentation as a method could not have been consistent with an AR orientation. However, if my presentation had been designed with open ended questions or had theme-generating images, it would have been more consistent with my paradigmatic position.

A similar critique could be made of the physical layout of the church for the meeting. A semi-circle could have been construed as an approach to foster dialogue. However, my entry indicates that my motivation for a semi-circle was in order to position everyone to see the screens displaying a rather didactic set of slides.

Throughout the unfolding co-planning process and Word Café I was striving for greater resonance between methods and methodology/orientation. This required me to be self-reflexive with others in exploring my ontological and epistemological assumptions about my being and knowing with others in the world. It was a case of "We're all in this together."

When did the conversation begin?

I turn to the comment made about this being "...the first step in the actual engagement in dialogue..." and interrogate it in terms of my own learning with the literature. There is a consensus amongst action researchers that dialogue is at the core of research (Kemmis, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008b, p. 3; Wicks & Reason,

2009; Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008, p. 195). Describing this as the first step in the dialogue now appears inadequate as it downplayed the importance of the testing of methodology in my pilot study with my previous congregation. It does not take account of the conversations both formal and informal that had taken place with individual Church members and diaconate of the Witney Church in the months prior to this meeting.[2] What it did reflect was the importance of the Church Meeting within Congregationalism as the supreme decision making body of the congregation. Consisting of all members, the Church Meeting could choose whether or not to participate in an inquiry. What I described as a first step was actually another stage in the dialogue which had been opening up incrementally into an ever deepening dialogue.

Essential to the dialogical process is self-critical awareness. Brydon-Miller (2008) identifies self-reflexivity as the starting point for ethical AR (cf. Coghlan, 2013). As self-aware researchers we are in a good position to enter into dialogue with potential research collaborators (2008, p. 205). Eikeland (2007b, p. 61) writes that "...immanent critique is fundamentally dialogical." Contrary to traditional forms of social science research which see the researcher as the observer of the other, he argues that "'Going native' is not a distortion, it is a precondition" (2007b, p. 57). The action researcher is a full participant who knows "You do not have to change *them* in order to understand *them*. In order to understand anything, you have to practice" (2007b, p. 62). Eikeland (2007b, p. 62) is clear that "self-reflective practitioner-research" involves the researcher knowing their own "nativeness". Reflection with the literature subsequent to this journal entry has led me to modify my claim that the Church Meeting was my first step in dialogue. It had begun long before in my first exposure to AR (embryonic as it was) and in undertaking the Ignatian spiritual exercises. These two self-reflective practices in company with others engendered inner awareness and prepared me for the conversations that I was to have in the cycles of inquiry into my practice of preaching.

Blurry boundaries

So what to make of my expressed desire for a 'pure' subject? First, this indicates my wish for the clear boundaries of a single discipline, and second, my

[2] The diaconate consists of deacons elected by the Church Meeting to conduct the day to day business of the church and to provide pastoral care to the congregation and support to the minister.

aversion to 'messiness'. Looking at the first aspect of sharp demarcations, I have already shown how AR defies this kind of clarity resisting easy definition and because of this is either ignored or vigorously marginalised by mainstream social science. Much of this criticism alleges a lack of rigour in establishing the validity of research claims.

Rigour and validity criteria are problematic principally because action researchers on the whole have tended to focus on practice without adequate attention to theoretical considerations. Brydon-Miller *et al.* (2003, p. 16) contend that

> There is much work left to be done in adequately articulating strong theoretical foundations for our work as action researchers. Olav Eikeland notes, 'I think most action research doesn't understand itself in adequate ways, which often, but not always, means that action researchers have better practices than theoretical self-understandings.'

Eikeland (2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2012) and Kemmis (2006, 2007, 2008) offer sustained philosophical frameworks for their approaches to AR, the former engaging with Aristotle and the latter with critical theory and Habermas. Eikeland (2007b, p. 39) is clear in his view that though there are a variety of approaches to AR "All of them are not equally defensible, neither to the same degree nor in the same ways." He is keen to develop an argument for AR that demonstrates why the mainstream social science approaches ought to take notice. He acknowledges that "For many working with participatory methods in development and change, this is an end in itself, as a way of broadening democratic practices" (2007b, p. 46). This laudable aim ends up in an AR cul de sac if "...the quality of knowledge produced..." and "...the quality of the participation..." cannot be clearly demonstrated and command respect in the mainstream (2007b, p. 46).

Greenwood (2012) offers another perspective on why AR finds itself on the outside looking in. He refers to Taylorism based on the factory production model developed by Taylor in 1911 (2012, p. 116). This is a conveyor belt process in which the production of the whole is broken down into small repetitive actions by individual workers. The system of production is designed by engineers and shop floor managers. Taylorism correlates to my desire for clear cut boundaries in which a set of well known steps produces the kind of research 'product' that is tidy.

Greenwood (2012, p. 121) asserts that AR is anti-Tayloristic and yet not averse to using some of the insights of Taylorism, though "opportunistically". It is anti-Tayloristic in that "AR is based on a holistic, systems understanding of the

complexity and dynamism of society's problems and on the premise that all relevant actors have key knowledge and actions to contribute to the analysis of and solutions to problems" (2012, p. 121). Greenwood (2012, p. 121) asserts that because AR does not fit into any "established box" it has "...to be swept up, deposited in some existing box or thrown out." The fact that AR defies categorisation puts it beyond assessment by the mainstream disciplines. This in turn calls its rigour and meaningfulness into question (2012, p. 121). The task is to re-imagine AR and its relationship to other disciplines.

Levin (2012) offers a stiff critique of AR demanding that its rightful concern with addressing real life situations be matched by the determination to demonstrate rigour. He postulates that the reason for the ferocious critique of AR by conventional scientific method is due to its opportunistic *modus operandi*. He argues that the antipathy of traditional science towards AR is because of its interdisciplinarity. Levin (2012, p. 135) is clear in his mind that "...seeking practical solutions in a holistic situation does ask for more than a singular discipline can offer. Rethinking disciplines is fundamental to rethinking social science." If AR is to command the attention of the traditional social sciences it will have to change from being "...endless stories of change process with little or no contribution to the scientific debate" (2012, p. 136). This resonates with Herr and Anderson's (2005, p. 84) call for AR to move beyond local knowledge generation to the extension of the literature. Levin believes that one of the main reasons that AR has not become a recognised voice in the social sciences is due to the fact that there is not a robust internal debate. There cannot be an effective response to the external critique until there is a coherent AR community. "Typically, different strands of thinking within AR rarely cite each other, much less embark on a critique of different AR strategies" (2012, p. 136). There can be no special pleading for AR. To be credible it has to meet the same rigorous criteria of the social sciences with the added dimensions of "...deep political and emotional engagement in the field" (2012, p. 142). He refers to these two dimensions as "rigor [sic] and relevance" (2012). Elaine Graham notes that relevance refers to "how AR counts as 'research' according to different conventions" (a comment in the margins of an early draft of my thesis).

Rigour and relevance resonates with Bradbury and Reason's (2006, p. 344) emphasis on holding together "...both the quality of our theory and with our holistic, everyday, lived experience." They set out five 'choice-points' for the assessment of

the quality and validity of research in order to stimulate this internal dialogue between action researchers and between AR and other disciplines (2006, p. 343). These are: the qualities of our participative-relational practices, practical outcomes, use of extended ways of knowing, assessing worthwhile purpose, and future sustainability of a culture of transformation (2006, pp. 244-346).

AR is not 'pure' in that it has not established a clearly defined disciplinary community and has struggled to make effective contributions to wider academic discourse. Demonstrating validity within and out with the AR community is a complex challenge. It will prove fruitful only if AR refuses to shrink from articulating the untidiness of real life practices conceptually.

The other aspect of my desire for clearly defined disciplinary boundaries related to fears of 'messiness' and, as I have already indicated, this phenomenon is not unique to AR. It is shared with other social science approaches such as ethnography. What distinguishes AR is that it embraces the ambiguities of being an involved researcher. It is at this point that I discovered I was caught between two worlds. Though I was committed to a participatory world view in which objective reality was known subjectively and through multiple ways of knowing, I continued to view reality through the lens of modernism. Action-reflection during my early attempts in the co-planning process with critical friends revealed that I was still giving precedence to theory over action and was considering strategies of 'data generation' that had objectivity as a motivation (e.g. PJ, 24 & 25.05.2010, 7.10.2010).

I began to realise that the hegemony of positivism was not unique to me. Among the various streams of AR the necessity to demonstrate validity in the wider academy, combined with its domestication especially in education, has tended to denude action inquiry of its destabilising potency (Herr & Anderson, 2005, pp. 19-24). Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 24, italics original) build on Schon's (1983) understanding of social institutions having an innate "*dynamic conservatism*." Argyris identifies this as the status quo. "Action research can either reproduce those norms, rules, skills, and values or it can challenge them. However, practitioners intuitively know that when they challenge the norms, the institutions' dynamic conservatism will respond in a defensive, self-protective manner" (2005, p. 24).

I want to bring into conversation the work of Ward (2004) and Stringer (2004) in Congregational Studies to consider the way in which the boundaries

between ethnography and AR are blurred (cf. Moschella, 2014). In the Introduction I introduced Ward's framing of ethnography as 'messy'. Though she makes no claim to be an action researcher her characterisation of the involved researcher bears striking similarities to the AR orientation and is therefore relevant to this analysis. For her the process of ethnographic research in Congregational Studies is an ambiguous, potentially painful, always involved and grappling with power relations. Yet it remains that for her that the *telos* of "Doing ethnography creates some sort of order out of the messiness of life..." (2004, pp. 126, 134-136). Her search for the position of a researcher that is "rendered invisible" in the text is at variance with AR (2004, p. 125).

This contrasts sharply with Stringer's (2004, pp. 209-210) concept of an action researcher who steps into "...a field situation with the explicit intention of becoming involved and making a difference" and "...who makes no pretence at objectivity...". He appears to be a strong proponent of AR portraying a subjective, involved researcher who "...aims at merging action with research, working towards solutions at the local level as part of the process of research itself" (2004, p. 211). Despite his assertion that action and research are closely bound together, he relates how he came to his research field (two Methodist churches) with his own theory ("sustainable church growth") based on his own experience (2004, pp. 208-209). His description of the 'field' and his unilateral importation of his theory point towards an observer-subject division which does not sit well with an AR approach. However, he goes on to collaborate in developing his theory which was more consistent with his claim to an AR ethos (2004, p. 212).

Of further interest to me is that Ward explicitly stakes her claim in the discipline of ethnography and apart from the occlusion of the researcher in the write-up, portrays a style of research that bears strong resemblances to AR. Conversely Stringer, who has explicitly claimed ethnography as his concern in the title of his paper, oddly does not give attention to ethnography in the rest of the essay. Instead there is exclusive focus on AR. Does Stringer view AR as ethnography? Certainly he introduces AR in terms of "entering a field situation" which is more the language of ethnography than of AR. His use of "consultancy" in the title suggests the expert entering the field to observe and analyse research subjects (cf. 2008, p. 38). Stringer's description of the action researcher as the one who "...gets in there with everybody else, gets their hands well and truly dirty, and takes the credit and the

blame alongside all those involved" is equally emphatic that this "...should probably not be the leader..." (2004, p. 212). It seems the researcher is to be involved but not too involved. This exclusion of leaders as researchers implies that their position risks their ability to be dispassionate. So it is that Stringer as with Ward, though asserting that the researcher must be immersed in their 'field', both remain within the dominant gravitational pull of traditional social science research.

Caught between two worlds: a worthy kind of research?

Action research embraces the ambiguities of being an involved researcher which is in stark contrast to scientific approaches that search for the position of objective observer. Though I was committed to a participatory world view in which objective reality was known subjectively and through multiple ways of knowing, I continued to view reality through the lens of modernism. Action-reflection during my early attempts in the co-planning process with critical friends revealed that I was still giving precedence to theory over action and was considering strategies of 'data generation' that had objectivity as a motivation (e.g. PJ, 24 & 25.05.2010, 7.10.2010).

My embeddedness in the modernist mindset became clear to me through the self-reflexive process. I make this visible through self-critically recounting two separate encounters with academics which were disconcerting to me. I begin with an experience which triggered an earlier memory. The first was in the context of a social event. I was in conversation with two men: the first an academic in the 'hard' sciences and the other a non-academic. The latter related that he had viewed a science documentary and though he had found it interesting it had gone over his head. The academic responded, "It shows just how limited your sight is." Later I wrote:

> ...I entered the fray and started talking about what constitutes real. I entered into a discussion with X about positivist and subjectivist views of reality. X...declared, "I prefer the hard sciences though without a doubt sociology has its place."
>
> He then turned to me and asked what my interest was in the subject. I explained I was an Action Researcher [sic] in contextual theology. I told him I was doing a PhD researching my own practice with my congregation. He asked, "May I ask what makes this worthy of a PhD?" I explained myself as best I could and he seemed cautiously satisfied.

> I relate this because I felt seriously undermined. I felt belittled and as if I had to defend myself against this positivist assault. It made me feel that my research interest was not "real" research. It tapped into my own sense of vulnerability. I was left wondering whether my research was 'valid' or 'worthwhile'. X seemed to be looking down on me from the lofty heights of one who truly understands and I am mentally weak/soft (PJ, 24.01.2011).

This encounter summoned up an earlier experience with an eminent theologian who inquired about my research. I explained that I was using AR to explore my own practice of preaching. He turned to his colleague and told him that I was using AR. His colleague responded by referring to it as "inaction research". This stung. I felt angry about being given short shrift. I do not know what the person intended 'inaction' to imply.

I have since related the charge of inaction research to what Bradbury Huang (2010, p. 97) encapsulates as a "...dismissive disdain that hovers over academics' conversations about action research." She is not entirely unsympathetic to such ridicule admitting her own scathing stance towards the whole empirical social science project. There is a so-called AR that is little more than "...some amalgam of uncritical consulting that leads to the reification of power relations in organizations and...forgets that contribution to theory and practice is also required" (p. 97). The validity of AR rests upon sustaining the fundamental epistemological relationship of action and theory.

Yet it is the generation of theory that is the Achilles heel of AR. The charge of inaction research demands that AR develops theory from practice and demonstrates how action has contributed to wider learning. Dick (2007) notes the propensity of action researchers in stressing theory building as essential to practice and yet failing to demonstrate how it is to be done. "More often than not 'theory' is mentioned. '*A* theory' isn't developed" (2007, p. 402, italics original). Theory is equated with reflection. "One acts, and reflects on the action. From the reflection, theory somehow arises" (2007, p. 402). He points to rare exceptions of AR explicitly constructing theory from a case study in the work of Huxham (2003). She makes clear that her principle concern is researching management and organisations which "...derives theoretical insights from naturally occurring data..." (2003, p. 240). She is not concerned with the kind of AR that focuses on "self-development or organisational development" or "ideological positions about participation and empowerment" (2003, p. 240). Crucially her AR is authentic because she is explicit

that her theory building from practice is not generalisable but context specific (2003, p. 246). Dick (2007, p. 403) is in no doubt that the deficit in developing clear frameworks for articulating theory leads to the charge that AR lacks rigour (cf. McKay & Marshall, 2001). This may contribute to the perception of 'inaction' research.

I return to my experiences with academics. I replayed and reflected on these incidents asking myself why I had been so unsettled:

> I suppose there is a part of me that believes that the only kind of research that matters in the modernist kind. As I noted previously in my journal, I'm deeply embedded in the traditional scientific world view.
>
> How do I remain true to my objective/subjective approach without denigrating or dismissing the positivist approach or scientific world view? (PJ, 24.01.2011)

My growing reflexivity raised my consciousness to a dissonance between my espousal of AR with my deeply held belief in the mainstream scientific method. It was the latent belief that the only kind of research that is 'worthy' is that which adheres to the objectivist approach of the researcher as observer of the 'field'. My assumption is laid bare in my reflection and resonates with Mellor's (2001, p. 466) own description of being caught between two worlds: "I was on the rack, with voices in my head constantly nagging that this wasn't 'real research', this wasn't science." He describes the difficulty of making the epistemological shift from his original natural sciences background with its assumptions of "solid" data to a new data (reflexive diaries) which appeared "softer, more fluid" (2001, p. 472). His words chimed with the language of my internal interlocutor. Crucially, this insight into what I truly considered to be 'science' assisted me in recognising my unrecognised assumptions. The discovery that my commitment to AR was in conflict with 'the only kind of research that matters', exposed my need to consider an epistemological framework capable of challenging traditional science without dismissing it altogether.

Is there a way to demonstrate that action research is a 'worthy' approach that achieves its professed aims of transformative 'action' (against the perception of 'inaction')? The issue of 'worthiness' is essentially a concern with 'validity'. Eikeland (2001) and Levin (2012) both give consideration to the relationship between AR and the traditional scientific approaches to knowledge generation

though from distinctly different perspectives. Both have put forward strong cases for AR contributing to the wider discourse of conventional sciences.

Eikeland offers an approach to AR that is located within traditional science. I have already outlined his argument that AR is the forgotten methodology (the hidden curriculum) within the conventional approach. This is startlingly at variance with other AR articulations when he asserts that far from being an alternative approach AR emergences from within "...the traditional scientific enterprise of the West" (2001, p. 145). The conceptual ideas of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle arose out of "...contexts where *practical* concepts of knowledge were taken as self-evident..." (2001, p. 145). Eikeland (2007b, p. 59) is clear that "action research is not anti-scientific" though he is equally certain that "conventional research is part of the problem, not part of the solution." The problem is that mainstream social science adopts the kind of observatory approach that is, "...pretending to be astronomy" (Eikeland, 2006b, p. 44). The principle difficulty with mainstream social science is "Othering" in which the outside researcher enters the "field" (Eikeland, 2007b, p. 58) whilst AR is about being immersed in practice. Eikeland (2001, p. 153) argues that they share common ground in immanent critique which is "the method of methodology" (2001, p. 154). "Hard core" AR is self-reflexivity within the research community (2007b, p. 53). This is the crux of his argument: conventional research methodology arises from the practices of research methods which are evaluated and modified within a research community of masters and apprentices (2001, p. 153, 2007b, pp. 51-52). This is immanent critique which is quintessentially AR, for "It is only making explicit tacit knowledge, and inner tensions and contradictions in such communities of practice or discourse formations provoking and promoting the development, the explication, and the actualization of inherent potentials in the practices" (2007b, p. 60).

Eikeland is adamant that it is for the mainstream social sciences to embrace the practice of immanent critique which is already latent within traditional research methodology. Practice is the only way to come to understanding and that to practice "You have to go native or realize that we are all always immersed as natives into some practices already, and provide the conditions for qualified participation by the natives in generating the necessary knowledge" (2001, p. 154, 2007b, p. 62). Eikeland's (2006b, 2007a, 2012) analysis of Aristotle allows him to affirm a spectrum of knowing ranging from spectator/observer to varied forms of practice.

There can be no dichotomy between theory and experience but rather "...local 'counter-public spheres' everywhere, for practically - and experientially - based theory development and learning" (2001, p. 154). The transformative potential of AR on both practice at the coal face and conventional social science is "...neglected by carving out a separate and special 'niche' for action research as complementary 'mediator' in-between the existing academic world and practitioners" (2006b, pp. 43-44).

Levin takes a different approach assuming that AR is distinct from science and yet must adhere to rigorous scientific method to gain legitimacy among the disciplines. He indicates appropriate uses of the scientific approach for knowledge generation as well as its limitations. He insists on the universal need for "scientific methods" to be used by AR to be credible in the mainstream of social science (Levin, 2012, pp. 137-138). The distinctive of AR is to live in the "field" (2012, p. 133) as one with "...deep engagement and involvement in local transformation processes" (2012, p. 141). AR that is 'worthy' has to demonstrate validity through rigour and relevance in relation to other scientific discourses.

The question remains: Is action research on my own practice of preaching a worthy kind of research? Based on the criteria of conventional social science the answer is "No." The burden of my thesis will be to argue the validity of this local, particular knowledge generation which resists universalising. At the same time it is my aim that this context specific learning and transformation will inspire other preachers and congregations to examine their *praxis*.

Action research: A local definition in dialogue with definitions in literature

I offer a definition of AR which emerged through my inquiry: *Action research is a* ***whole-life*** *quality of attention to self-in-relation-to-others-in-the-world acting, reflecting, planning and renewing action through dialogue which includes the unique contribution of each person in generating knowledge that works and transforms.*

I give attention to various themes arising from this definition. First, I discuss the significance of a shift from capital to lower case in presenting action research. Second, I establish one of the principle features of AR as *whole-life inquiry*. Third, I consider the complexities involved in assessing 'what works'. Finally, I examine the nature of knowledge generation as learning by doing.

From Big Case to little case

The whole-life nature of action research arises out of a key development in my understanding in terms of the way I signify action research in writing. At the time I prepared the slides I capitalised 'Action Research'. Since my first exposure to action research I have made a shift to small case. This may seem a trivial matter and yet it expresses a crucial shift in my conceptualisation of what action research is. I have formed the view that using capital letters for action research suggests a tool among many to be taken out of the kit to explore a particular research question. By using 'action research' with small case I denote a whole life approach to knowing. Chandler and Torbert (2003, p. 134) write, "...action research can become the guiding method by which we organize our everyday inquiries and actions." The move from Action Research to action research is a presentational shift denoting that "...it is a verb rather than a noun" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2).

Whole-life inquiry

In this I have been influenced by the work of Reason and Bradbury. In describing AR in the slide as 'a lifestyle of being together' I was expressing the conviction that AR is "...not so much a *methodology*...as an *orientation toward* inquiry...that seeks to create a quality of engagement, of curiosity, of question-posing through gathering evidence and testing practices" (2006c, p. xxi; cf. Reason & McArdle, 2004). This is a holistic approach that insists that every action is pregnant with potential for knowledge generation and transformation as we develop the quality of attention to the present. Eikeland (2007b, p. 40) proffers "...that action research is research, somehow concerned with practice and with some kind of social and personal change." His broad and "imprecise" definition usefully indentifies transformation of practices of individuals and communities. Bradbury Huang (2010, p. 93) succinctly captures the authentic nature of action-reflection when she writes that "...only through action is legitimate understanding possible; theory without practice is not theory but speculation." With Reason (2008b, p. 4) she fleshes out a definition that is widely recognised by action researchers (cf. Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003, pp. 10-11; Chandler & Torbert, 2003, p. 134; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, pp. 3-4; Snoeren, et al., 2012, p. 190):

> "...action research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities."

In the first *Handbook* the word 'democratic' followed the word participatory. Though the word was dropped in the second *Handbook* it seems significant in understanding what is meant by participatory. Democratic participation indicates that the actions and words of every individual within the community are a valued part of the whole in the pursuit of creating knowledge. The nature of this inclusive participation subverts approaches to knowledge that privilege some people over others: experts over novices, teachers over students and so on. Bradbury Huang (2010, p. 93, italics original) boldly claims "*...that action research represents a transformative orientation to knowledge creation that action researchers seek to take knowledge production beyond the gate-keeping of professional knowledge makers.*"

Action research: it does what it says on the tin!

Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 3) choose action research "as an umbrella term" for the plethora of approaches. Crucially they emphasise that their choice of AR is because the term itself contains what is its essence: *action* (cf. McKay & Marshall, 2001, p. 47). This distinguishes it from traditional research methods that tend towards the distant observer. "The term *action research* leaves the positionality (insider or outsider) of the researcher open" (p. 3). AR has as its *telos* the human flourishing of individuals and communities. This value means that the researcher, whatever their identified positionality, refuses to enter into an exploitative relationship with those whom they are researching. Common to the wide ranging approaches and strong differences of viewpoint "...action research is inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organisation or community, but never *to* or *on* them" (p. 3, italics original; cf. Reason & Bradbury, 2006c, p. xxv).

In the last two bullet points in the presentation I introduced a foundational epistemological concern of AR: what does and does not work. Or put simply, does it work? Action (or practice) that 'works' is the trajectory of AR. This relates to the nature of what it is to say that AR is transformative. Hillon and Boje (2007, p. 360) maintain that "What works?" is the ultimate question of AR which is "...the simple

pragmatic question...". Reason and Bradbury (2006b, p. 12, italics original) include it as one question among "...pragmatic *questions of outcomes and practice.*"

How is it possible to know 'what works'? What 'works' for one person or group in a particular situation may not work for individuals and communities in other situations. Furthermore, it is possible that within a particular context there may be a difference of opinion about 'what works'. This does not invalidate the question. Rather, it requires that we define the criteria for 'what works'.

Eikeland (2012) points to the utilitarian approach of Francis Bacon which is foundational to modernity and the prevailing scientific approach. This approach finds out 'what works' by acting to "...squeeze, bend, break, cut, stretch, and twist 'mother nature'..." (2012, p. 15). Though action researchers are united in their resistance to the distant observer approaches to both natural and behavioural sciences, they express diverse conceptualisations of the nature of involved research. "Several contrary and even contradictory things may 'work', and they may work in quite different ways. There are many ways of inducing changes in people's behaviour, not all of which are equally recommendable" (2012, p. 15). So whilst there are many different approaches to being an involved researcher and generating varieties of knowledge, the key is to identify the "...different ethical and political implications" (2012, p. 15). Eikeland's (2012, p. 17) key contribution is that no particular way of knowing should be dismissed out of hand, "Not even purely disengaged 'spectator research'...". Rather he places AR as a particular approach critical of other ways of knowing without being dismissive of them. The purpose of AR is to overcome the division between theory-practice and of the outsider-insider dichotomy (2012, pp. 18-19).

The critical issue of 'what works' in AR is measured by the values that are espoused and enacted. The AR orientation has humanisation/human flourishing as its aim. This is behind Reason and Bradbury's (2006b, p. 12) questions, "What are the processes of the inquiry? Are they authentic/life changing?" McNiff *et al.* (2003, p. 13) point out that "Action research is more than problem solving..." but is shaped by the researcher's values (cf. Coghlan, 2013). "To be action research, there must be praxis which embodies practice. Praxis is informed, committed action that gives rise to knowledge as well as successful action" (p. 13). What works or leads to successful action is dependent on *praxis* informed by collaborative conversations in

which the commitments and values of participants are critically evaluated. AR involves sustained reflexivity through dialogue.

During the co-planning process there was a discussion around the question of 'what works' that arose out of the power point presentation. I expressed the view to the groups that AR is relational. It is not "...a scientific experiment in a laboratory, it's about real people and it's messy..." The aim is not to arrive at "an objective truth" but

> ...fostering relationships and actually having these kinds of discussions about wisdom and power and what they mean. And we might not agree at the end of the day and we're not really supposed to but greater understanding and being made to think and finding out what works. What works matters most. That's what I am going to say. Does it? (PPPM, 26.03.2010, group 3, pp. 14-15)

A participant immediately responded, "...um, yes, because what works, it will work for some people and not for others" (PPPM, 26.03.2010, group 3, pp. 14-15). A specific example was given of how a particular emerging church style of worship had worked for some and not for others. This was discussed at the Church Meeting. Though there was no consensus of opinion, those for whom it did not 'work' agreed to offer support.

The dialogue in the co-planning meeting around 'what works' and in the Church Meeting is suggestive that reflexivity has to have an intentional space created in order for it to take place. This resonates with key practitioners and thinkers in AR. Lewin insisted that the context for effective change occurred in a planned group context. The group had to be "...marked by a commitment to self-examination, active confrontation with one's own perceptions and perceptions held by the other group members..." (Bargal, 2006, p. 380) and with a commitment to solve problems. Kemmis (2006, p. 103, italics original), developing the philisophical ideas of Habermas, argues for the pivotal nature of the group stating that "The first step in action research turns out to be central: *the formation of a communicative space* which is embodied in networks of actual persons... A communicative space is constituted as issues or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants experience their interaction as fostering the democratic expression of divergent views" (cf. Kemmis, 2008, pp. 127-131). The *telos* of such a communicative space is to "...achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do..." (2006, p. 104). Wicks and Reason (2009) analyse the "challenges and paradoxes" of creating communicative space and do so with particular examples from the real world. Add

to this Eikeland's call for *skhole*, dialogical arenas. He argues the importance of "A permanent *skhole* (leisure - open, free space - school) embedded in practical settings is needed, making it possible to develop, unfold, articulate the 'grammars' of different social settings" (2006b, p. 45). According to his interpretation of Aristotle, in the *skhole* no dichotomy exists between what he calls "deliberation and dialogue" (2006b, pp. 46-48). Deliberation refers to the performance of practice. Dialogue is reflection and inquiry upon it and space needs to be created for this to happen. A crucial characteristic of this space for dialogue is leisure, which describes conditions where there is no pressure for immediate action. AR is not the activity of a fleeting moment but rather involves sustained reflexivity through the creation and maintenance of dialogical space.

Foundational to AR is the development of practices enabling reflexivity in the moment of action in a nexus of self, others and the world. Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 4, italics original) identify four qualities of AR the first being that it is "research *in* action, rather than *about* action." Second, it is "a collaborative democratic partnership." Third, it is "research concurrent with action." Finally, it is "a sequence of events and an approach to problem solving." This is what Chandler and Torbert (2003) name "timely action" (cf. Torbert & Taylor, 2008). Timely action is "...consciousness - the experience of presence in the present..." (Chandler & Torbert, 2003, p. 137) requiring qualities of attention to the territories of experiencing the external world, my own actions from within, and my thoughts and feelings simultaneously. "In action research, timely action in the present, transforming historical patterns into future possibilities, is the ultimate aim and achievement" (2003, p. 135). Thus AR is a whole-life approach which requires that the attentive, aware researcher holds past and future together by being alive to the present.

Generating knowledge: learning by doing

In the power point presentation I asserted that AR "...is learning by doing". In my tentative definition I wrote of "generating knowledge". A value that is shared in the AR community is a commitment to creating knowledge in practice. But to assert that theory arises from practice denotes an epistemological commitment which in turn shapes our methodology and methods.

Ladkin (2004) makes the case for AR located within the broad discipline of qualitative research methodologies. She searches for a definition and attempts to draw together common threads represented within the different types of AR. She opts for McKernan's problem orientated definition of AR which is both practical and scientific. She sums up his process with her own "cycles of inquiry": a problem is identified, an action plan addresses the issue(s), effectiveness is evaluated, and insights made public to the AR community (2004, p. 537). An important difference between my own definition and McKernan's is the focus on problem orientated research. Although AR usefully addresses problems I also think that it is effective in identifying good practice that is already in place. My shift of emphasis away from problem or deficit focussed research resonates with ***appreciative inquiry*** (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2006; Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008).

Ladkin (2004, p. 538) identifies four assumptions that underpin AR. These provide indicators of authenticity. First, there is the explicit intent to improve practice and understanding. Second, AR embraces multiple ways of knowing. Third, the approach focuses on the process of co-research more than on measurable outcomes. Finally, action researchers set out to raise awareness of the positionality of the researcher: e.g. the researcher embedded in the social context with the researched within particular "frames". The epistemology of AR is that knowing grows out of doing and is not limited to conceptual theories.

As for my own formation as an action researcher, the action-reflection, practice-theory, doing-conceptualising was and to some extent continues to be a challenge. The deeply engrained positivist world view whispered to me that I needed to read more and get my theory straight before doing the research. A critical friend, David Adams, responded to one of my papers with an insight that cut to the core. I recalled that

> ...he felt I was operating out of a positivist world view. He felt I was trying to work out 'theory' prior to the research/fieldwork. He challenged me to 'tell the story' and simply 'do it'. Whilst reading is important, he encouraged me to do the research with the congregation and allow my theorising and reading to be shaped by the process" (PJ, 24.05.2010).

This de-stabilised my self-conception of being an 'action researcher' and chimes with Mellor's (2001, p. 472) confession in his diary of being theory driven, "I realise I am still trapped in my positivistic, scientific frame!" I was fearful on the eve of the co-planning meetings. As the new day dawned I stepped into all the uncertainty and

messiness of being-with-others-in-the world with Dave's words "...ringing in my ears, 'Do it.' It is an act of faith for me" (PJ, 25.05.2010). If AR is an *orientation* then I would argue that those who practice this whole-life way of inquiry go through a process of *re-orientation*. Mellor conjures up the image of a "...battle with 'validity'..." and how "...the pull of science and the belief in my own ability to create 'knowledge' were not, however, resolved (at least to a partial level of satisfaction) for quite some time"(2001, p. 472). This orientation and re-orientation towards action inquiry demands humility.

The nature of this humility is fleshed out by Freire (1970). He refused any division between reflection and action, maintaining that together they constitute *praxis*. The "word" is quintessentially dialogical and dialogue arises out of love, humility, faith, and critical thinking of people sharing "horizontal" relations, naming the world by "creating and re-creating" (1970, pp. 68-72) . "There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world" (1970, p. 68). The dialogue demands "...critical thinking - thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them..." (p. 73). In essence, the humility needed for the dialogue is one of equality between people.

THE STORY AND STREAMS OF ACTION RESEARCH

I turn to set action research in its broad context first by sketching its history and then introducing the various members of the family. This will enable me to locate the distinctive features and resemblances of my own inquiry in relation to AR. My purpose is not to write a definitive account of AR but rather to set the context for my inquiry. A thoroughgoing introduction to the history and strands of AR is found in Greenwood and Levin (2007), the two handbooks brought together by Reason and Bradbury (2001, 2008c), and Coghlan and Brydon-Miller's expansive encyclopaedic treatment (2014). Rounded overviews of AR are offered by Herr and Anderson (2005, pp. 8-28) and Coghlan and Brannick (2010, pp. 35-50). Brief surveys include Reason and McArdle (2004, pp. 114-118), Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, pp. 560-563), Pasmore (2006, pp. 38-40), Bradbury *et al.* (2008), Eikeland (2007a, pp. 345-347), and a innovative philosophical critique by Cassell and Johnson (2006).

I want to be clear that I did not begin my action inquiry having explicitly identified myself with a particular strand of AR. Rather, in my practice I eclectically

gleaned concepts from AR literature that enabled me to act and reflect more effectively. I stepped into other fields such as homiletics, Congregational Studies, and practical theology to fuel and augment my *praxis*. This interdisciplinary approach is the lifeblood of AR which has been "...promiscuous in its sources of theoretical inspiration" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 3). This image of promiscuity suggests casual encounters. Whatever AR is and whatever its sources, it is ideologically and politically committed and honours the philosophical fountainheads that feed its wide river.

Adams (2011, p. 4) offers a more helpful metaphor, that of foraging in different fields. This is suggestive of the action researcher in search of nourishment, looking for practices and theories that feed transformative *praxis*. My intention of telling the story of AR is to map out the fields so that I am able to be explicit about where I have foraged. Importantly in Adams' thought the 'fields' are not limited to the discourse of any particular discipline. Sources for nourishment arise from conversations too. I would extend this further to include any experience that nourishes *praxis* (e.g. novels, film, art, sport, dance, music making).

Historical overview

Equal to the challenge of defining AR is giving an account of its origins and historical development. Brydon-Miller *et al.* (2003, p. 11) attribute this complexity to the fact that "...it is not a single academic discipline but an approach to research that has emerged over time from a broad range of fields." Cassell and Johnson (2006, pp. 783-784) in their attempt to give shape to the various strands of AR during its "long history" make it clear at the outset "...that the meanings attached to the term, the sources of inspiration deployed and the practices it sanctions are so diverse that there appears to be no unifying theory." Reason and Bradbury (2006b, p. 2) bluntly state that "We doubt if it is possible to provide one coherent history of action research."

Even as I contemplate the task of making sense of the complexity, I am struggling to put my thoughts into words. I'm overwhelmed by the diversity of AR schemas. I face the reality that as much as I'm drawn to AR I barely grasp this field. It seems to have no boundaries. The interpenetration and divergence of practices and conceptualisations means that as with many close knit families there are bitter feuds. It has the feel of unravelling various strands of yarn that are knitted together -

however loosely - by a common commitment to democratic knowledge generation that arises from practice. AR defies the label of discipline.

The development of AR has been described by Eikeland (2007a, pp. 345-346) as coming in waves, the first being experimental and the second characterised as more reflective. There is a general consensus that AR began with Lewin's (1946) *Action Research and Minority Problems*. The second wave swells up during the 1970's. Eikeland (2007a, p. 346) considers that this distinct new development in AR may be separated out into two streams. The first is of the professional action researcher working with clients and the second is of AR being carried out by the professional practitioners researching their own practice.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 560) consider AR to have four generations. The first and second generation correspond to Eikeland's two waves. Whereas Eikeland judges the second wave to be disparate, Kemmis and McTaggart closely identify this next generation as growing out of particular British trends out of the Tavistock Institute which emphasised practical issues. They go on to suggest that the impetus for the birth of a third generation of AR came out of a challenge from Australia to go beyond these practical concerns arguing for "critical" and "emancipatory" aims. The fourth generation shared the concerns of critical emancipatory research and Participatory Action Research but were grounded in particular social movements (e.g. Freire). This generation demanded theory for action research that was more "actionist" and would influence broader social agendas.

Cassell and Johnson (2006) propose a novel schema based on the philosophical underpinnings of the various AR approaches. Before doing so, they acknowledge the multitudinous categorisations of AR, paying particular attention to two thorough going analyses. The first is Raelin (1999) who, collaborating with the various contributors to a special issue of *Management Learning*, identifies six action strategies (action research, participatory research, action learning, action science, developmental action inquiry, and cooperative inquiry) and fourteen criteria against which to assess each. The second is Chandler and Torbert's (2003) elaborate typology "interweaving 27 flavours of action research" underpinned by voice, practice, and time dimensions.

In contrast Cassell and Johnson (2006, p. 787) propose "...to analyse some of the various approaches to action research in detail and to explain their diversity in

terms of variation in the action researcher's underlying philosophical commitments." They categorise the various streams of AR by analysing a spectrum of ontological and epistemological assumptions ranging from a positivist to subjectivist perceptions of reality. Essentially their assessment focuses on varied perceptions of the subject-object relationship, of the knower relating to that which is being known (p. 787). They suggest five umbrella terms for their philosophical analysis: experimental, inductive, participatory action research, participatory, and deconstructive. Whilst they claim not to be making a judgement between what is 'good' or 'bad' AR, they do concede that their own commitments shape their articulation of the various streams. In short, the first three categories are considered to have positivist influences whilst the fourth objective-subjective conceptualising is given lengthy treatment which suggests it is nearest to their own *praxis*. The fifth subjectivist approach is somewhat grudgingly admitted as an AR philosophical approach which serves to destabilise dominant narratives. Whilst their assessment of each strand is moot, their critical contribution is to demonstrate the importance of scrutinising the ontological and epistemological assumptions that give shape to different methodologies (cf. Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

Meet the members of the family

The challenge here is deciding how broad or precise should be the delineation of the family tree. My purpose is that of locating my own AR inquiry within the wider context. To this end I make general introductions borrowing the categories of north, south and human inquiry (2007, pp. 13-34) and go on focus on those AR streams that have shaped my practice.

Northern tradition

In this section we look at the origins of AR in the United States and Europe in its classical forms. AR was driven by social conditions linked to the second World War and the post war years.

I have already identified Kurt Lewin as a key figure in the genesis of AR. His interest in organisations was expressed through his coining of the term 'group dynamics'. It is important to set the context for the contribution of Lewin and his description as the 'father' of this amorphous field (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 37; Docherty, Ljung, & Stjernberg, 2006; O'Brien, 1998). Though Lewin is most readily

identified as the founder of AR there has been a growing recognition of John Collier (1945) in his work with and writing about North American Indians. There is widespread agreement that Dewey (1910) is the philosophical fountainhead of AR for both Lewin and Collier (cf. Bargal, 2006; Day & Thomson, 2012, p. 158; Eikeland, 2007a; Pasmore, 2006, pp. 38-39). Dewey's emphasis on reflective thinking was aimed at "...educators to teach students how to think, rather than teaching facts" (2006, p. 38). This style of thinking was of a practical nature. His concern for practice based thinking was combined with his passion for democracy. Allport (1946) in his Preface to a collection of Lewin's essays notes that, "There is a striking kinship between the work of Kurt Lewin and the work of John Dewey. Both agree that democracy must be learned anew in each generation, and that it is a far more difficult form of social structure to attain and to maintain than is autocracy. Both see the intimate dependence of democracy upon social science" (1948, p. xi). He continues, "Dewey, we might say, is the outstanding philosophical exponent of democracy, Lewin its outstanding psychological exponent" (p. xi).

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 560) note that there are arguably other sources for AR beyond Lewin. This is recognised by Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 11) although they are clear that, "...he was the first to develop a theory of action research that made it a respectable form of research in the social sciences." What is beyond dispute is that it is Lewin's theorising of practical concepts that propelled him to the forefront of AR.

Lewin's academic standing is the principle reason that he has overshadowed Collier in the historical memory. This does not diminish the work of Collier in developing action research with First Nations people in America. In a response to a paper published to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the publication of Lewin's key article (1946), Neilson (2006) pleaded *But let us not forget John Collier*. Neilson points out that Collier (1945, p. 294) was the first to use 'action-research' in an academic journal. Neilson sets out to demonstrate a number of parallels with Lewin's thought. Significantly, Collier had a more utilitarian AR approach with the intent of directly improving social conditions for First Nations people whereas Lewin's AR was grounded in a social-psychological scientific framework (2006, p. 396).

Growing out of Lewin's work are various strands of AR in organisations ranging from industrial concerns with production to soft systems which refers to

human relations (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). These developments were innovative in their concern for the scientific enterprise to occur in real life situations and to nurture democratic participation. However, they were principally concerned with organisational efficiency and attempts to encourage worker ownership of company aims.

Southern tradition

There are a few towering figures in this tradition. The watershed moment in the South occurred with the publication of Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). He advocated an approach to education that had the concern of liberation at its core. Strongly influenced by Marxism, he developed the term conscientization to express the way that groups of people might have their consciousness raised to their own oppression and discover their own way to freedom. Freire's ideas emerged out of his political-social commitment to transformation through collaborative or dialogical learning. Through mutual dialogical learning the oppressed perceive the systems of oppression and in bringing about their own liberation seek ways to free their oppressors from being perpetrators of injustice. Freire was enormously influential within liberationist movements, particularly in the development of liberation theology. Greenwood and Levin (2007, p. 178) capture the sweep of his writing as "...a complex combination of neo-Marxism, Gramscian perspectives, liberation theology, and organizing, a heady mix that he brings together under the general rubric of an expansive concept of 'pedagogy'." His approach to literacy was to work with communities to identify themes important to them as a basis for literacy and to see and to solve the social issues they faced. Herr and Anderson (2005) offer a pithy summary of his approach, "...literacy involves learning to read the word and the world."

Freire's *praxis* raises significant questions of power. There is a supposition that the oppressed require a facilitator to bring about conscientization. This suggests that there is a person or persons who are already liberated. The oppressed somehow require an ideal human who is freed from the chains of oppression. There is a risk of the teacher-liberator adopting a paternalistic relationship with the student and the oppressed. It assumes a level of integrity on the part of the coordinator that is idealistic and thus unrealistic. Furthermore, his approach suggests that the oppressed

do not have the insight or power to gain freedom without the assistance of someone from the outside who is already enlightened.

Freire is a significant voice in the whole family of action research approaches. His *praxis* has been most influential amongst those family members who take the name of participatory research or participatory action research. Freirian ideas course through the work of Fals Borda and Rahman (1991). In this approach, "The dualisms of macro/micro, theory/practice, subject/object, and research/teaching are collapsed" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 16). Contrary to the more individualistic AR strategies, PAR insists that every local context is shaped by wider social realities. Every theory is a practice and the sounder the practice the better the theory. There can be no subject/object but rather subject/subject. Research and teaching are inextricably bound up together. In Fals Borda and Rahman (1991, pp. 4, 11) the essence of PAR is *vivencia* which is experiencing wholeness of self in relation to "the Other" both in mind and affections (or as they put it, "brain" and "heart"). It seems to me that *vivencia* corresponds to Freire's humanisation. Participatory research is committed to liberation of the oppressed through empowerment. This is brought about through four aspects of communication: collaborative (collective) research, critical recovery of history as a source for liberation, identification of core local values, and the generation of new knowledge (1991, pp. 8-9).

Human Inquiry

This label enfolds aspects of northern and southern practices and theories. It is an eclectic gathering which could justifiably be identified with the New Paradigm Research Group formed by Heron, Reason and Rowan in London, 1977 (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 32). Though there is divergence in their practice and theory development they have carried out their pursuits in relationship to each other and in a spirit of openness and inclusivity. In particular, Reason and Bradbury (2006a, 2008c) have drawn together the diversity of the AR community in their two handbooks bringing "...a kind of order into the field without suppressing the differences among us" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, pp. 208-209). In summarising the various inquiry approaches I am not suggesting that these are descendents of the New Paradigm but that there is much interpenetration of practice and theory between them due to the coordinating work of Reason and his colleagues. The varied AR strands that I discuss have a stronger affinity with the northern Lewinian focus on

organisational development whilst at the same time having been influenced, at least to some extent, by the southern liberationist agenda.

I now give attention to particular action inquiry approaches which have been significant in the development of my own *praxis*. These are: *developmental action inquiry, critical action research, and cooperative inquiry*. Argyris' *action science*, particularly the notions of espoused theory and theory in action, made an impact on my practice. Torbert (1999, p. 191) points out that Argyris borrowed the term action science from him neglecting the key issue of attention to self with others for larger social groupings. He felt these were critical and coined the term *developmental action inquiry* to denote his emphasis on the formational nature of learning. His critique of Argyris is that he offered an idealist form of professional practice within organisations whilst he (Torbert) advocates an individualistic form of learning 'on line'. It has a strong focus on individual self-awareness creating potential for transformation in groups and organisations. This is learning through cultivated practices of attention in the moment through first, second, third person practice across four territories of experience (visioning, strategising, performing, assessing) and using the four parts of speech (framing, advocating, illustrating, inquiring) (2008, pp. 242, 244).

Kemmis has taken a leading role in *critical participatory action research* and is a significant voice in the literature of *educational action research* (2005). Building on the critical theory of Habermas, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 560) argue for a "...broad social analysis - the self-reflective collective self-study of practice, the way in which language is used, organization and power in a local situation, and action to improve things." Such a thorough going social critique resists individualistic forms of AR by holding together critical self-reflection as part of a wider social context. Kemmis fleshes out the social dimension through his analysis and interpretation of Habermas' theory of communicative action and the opening up of communicative space.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 563) offer a concise definition of their critical practice and theory: "At its best, then, participatory action research is a social process of collaborative learning realized by groups of people who join together in changing the practices through which they interact in a shared social world in which, for better or worse, we live with the consequences of one another's actions." The manner of the change process is through continuing cycles of

planning, acting-observing, and reflection in collaboration with others. They strongly resist individualistic self-reflexive AR approaches. This is not to say that individual self-reflection is not important but that it is to be located within a nexus of collaborative relationships. As there can be no dichotomy of action-reflection, practice-theory, so none exists in the relation of individual-social. Self is not singular but plural, "...a sociality that has shaped it as a 'self'" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 126). Conceptually they argue that "*If practices are constituted in social interaction between people, changing practices is a social process*" (2005, p. 563, italics original). So the plural self socially constructed is "As Habermas (1992, p. 26) remarks following George Herbert Mead: 'no individuation is possible without socialization, and no socialization is possible without individualization'" (in Kemmis, 2008, p. 126). They identify seven characteristics of participatory action research: a social process, participatory, practical and collaborative, emancipatory, critical, reflexive (both understanding in order to change and changing in order to understand), and transforming theory-practice.

Kemmis and McTaggart locate critical PAR as one tradition among five in what they call the study of practice. This clarifies different ontological and epistemological lenses through which practice is viewed. Our world view shapes our methodology and in turn influences the methods that we use in generating knowledge about practice. Four traditions take two essential perceptions of practice, objective or subjective. Each lens gives greater emphasis to the individual or the social. The fifth tradition, critical participatory action research, transgresses such bifurcations and adopts an objective-subjective view of practice with individual-social dimensions. This holistic understanding construes "Practice as socially and historically constituted and as reconstituted by human agency and social action..." (2005, pp. 572-573).

Kemmis' (2006, 2008) interpretation and development of Habermas' conceptualising of communicative action and space is of particular relevance to my research (cf. Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). These ideas have been part of the critical framework both for development and analysis of the research process. Although I do not want to conflate the Word Café method we used with communicative space, it is clear to me that the features of this concept are important in assessing to what extent Word Café was the opening of communicative space.

Finally, there is the *cooperative inquiry* of Heron and Reason (2006, pp. 144-154, 2008, pp. 366-380). Core to cooperative inquiry is the insistence that research is *with* people not *for* or *on* people. It is the quest to increase understanding and engender fresh perspectives through the activities of sensemaking. This empowers actors to discover strategies for change in which transformation is the norm (2006, p. 144). "Cooperative inquiry is a form of second-person action research in which all participants work together in an inquiry group as co-researchers and as co-subjects" (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 366).

There are four phases involved in this form of inquiry as it moves through cycles of action and reflection (Heron & Reason, 2006). First, there is a gathering of a group of people who have identified a common interest in a particular practice who are willing to become co-researchers. Second, each co-researcher simultaneously becomes a co-subject through their involvement in the inquiry. The third phase occurs when "...the co-subjects become fully immersed in and engaged with their action and experience" (2006, p. 145). Phase four involves a gathering together of co-researchers and co-subjects to share insights/outcomes and to assess areas where original ideas about practice were confirmed and where there were challenges and shifts in thinking. This stage leads into further iterative cycles of action and reflection.

At the heart of this approach is a radical construction of knowledge which they flesh out as an extended epistemology (2006, 2008). There are four ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical. There is experiential knowing that arises from our immediate encounter with people, places or things. Presentational knowledge is finding a form (music, art, drama etc...) to order and express the tacit learning of experience. Propositional knowledge is theoretical ideas about the way things are expressed both verbally and in written form. Practical knowledge is acquiring competencies through doing them.

CONCLUSION

AR is a messy business because it follows the untidiness that is life itself. The definition of AR and the survey of literature emerged from key narratives. I have traced the nascent research question as its features matured from the pilot project through to the co-planning process through to the birth of Word Café. In the way I have written the narrative I have sought to portray the meandering twists and

bends in the journey towards authentic practice. My commitment to the AR orientation has been unsettled by the strong positivist assumptions shaping the modern era. Eikeland's (2007b, p. 59) argument that AR is not "anti-scientific" but rather shares immanent critique with the natural sciences resonates with my own *praxis*, refusing a rupture between theory and practice, academy and practitioner. In my portrayal of the diversity of the AR orientation, I have chosen what I term 'the option for practice'. I have prioritised the narrative in dialogue with the literature to avoid the former voices being drowned out by those of the experts in academe. This is not intended to drive a wedge between practice and theory but rather to counter the dominance of the positivist objective observer.

Having set the context for what it is to commit to the AR way of life, I proceed to assess the possibility of a mutual dialogue with PT. In assessing the potential for AR contributing to the theological task, the engagement with the literature of PT will be propelled forward by the plot of my story of learning and discovery. In this way, the features of ART will become clear.

CHAPTER 2
ACTION RESEARCH AS A WAY OF DOING THEOLOGY: IS IT AN ART?

Context matters. Context is all. *Umwelt* (Fowler, 2014, p. 175)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I focus attention on what I mean when I speak of action research as a way of doing theology. I have already offered a definition of AR exploring its origins and diversity and so consider what I mean by 'doing theology'. I explore AR with its practice-centred knowledge generation how it may be a way of doing theology. First, I set my encounter with AR and PT in context as an intuitive and creative process leading me towards conceptualising ART. Second, I examine five key treatments in which an explicit link has been made between theology and AR. I argue that the fifth approach, that of Coghlan, provides an epistemological framework for ART in that he refuses to collapse his professional role as an organisation action researcher into Ignatian spirituality though he describes his relationship with the two as being perched on a boundary (cf. Graham, 2013b, p. 174). Finally, building on his work, I set out a vision for ART in which 'doing theology' with an action research orientation refuses colonisation of that discipline instead opting for mutual correlation. I draw upon two sources in PT to aid in negotiating the boundaries between the disciplines: first, Graham's vision of communities of faith nurturing wisdom and second Reader's concept of *blurred encounters*. The penetrating question is, "How do we authentically inhabit the world of faith and enter into a genuine dialogue with AR discourses in our practice of ART?"

COLOURS FOR THE ART PALLET

The image of colours on an artist's pallet is suggestive of the way in which the artist takes the brush and mixes the paint in order to create an image on the canvas. The artistic process is both intentional and intuitive. It requires acquiring and employing skills in which planning, precision and surprise combine to make the work of art.

The colours for my ART pallet consist of AR, PT and the Ignatian exercises. These encounters generated knowledge which I blended together in exploring with my congregation my practice of preaching the Bible. Each colour was new to me

and I had to choose to place them on my pallet. In this sense my engagement was intentional as I acquired new knowledge and skills. It was intuitive in that I was astonished by the way in which combining the spectrum of colours offered new and vibrant ways of seeing and transforming my practice. I was engaged in an ART-ful integration of action-reflection practices.

After a decade in pastoral ministry I embarked on a postgraduate programme in 2004. In my previous undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in theology I had encountered practical theology as applied theology. I had never engaged with the practice of theological reflection or any form of pastoral cycle. I had never heard of AR and thus found myself entirely ignorant of the practices and theorisation associated with this orientation. The notion in PT that practices were bearers of theological insight and could be understood through drawing upon a wide range of disciplines was a significant challenge to my existing paradigm. It was groundbreaking for me to consider that disciplines that could be described as secular (e.g. psychology, sociology, history) could interrogate theological discourse. It was a seismic shift to think that there could be mutuality between the disciplines. Initially, my engagement with AR was principally influenced through Freire (1970) and Argyris' conceptualisation of espoused theory and theory in action (via Dick & Dalmau, 2000). I experimented with the colours of theological reflection, pastoral cycles, and AR in three sustained pieces of research submitted as part of my studies (e.g. Boyd, 2010b).

As my postgraduate studies were opening up new vistas, I stumbled into the Ignatian exercises. This came about through a startling experience which left me bewildered. I was settled in my Scottish congregation and declared to Viviane that I would be content to remain with these people for the rest of my ministry. She asked me whether I was becoming complacent. Within weeks I felt as if I had been grabbed by the shoulders and shaken to attention. Three individuals whom I held in regard and who were not connected to my congregation asked me whether it was time for me to move on. After the third person made this comment I was troubled to such a degree that I went to my study and turned to the Bible readings for the day. I was shocked that each of the readings (Numbers 33:1; Psalm 39:12; and Luke 8:21) spoke to me of a kind of moving on. I found myself weeping and feeling afraid. I did not know what to make of the questions and the Bible readings. What was God saying to me?

I shared my consternation with a colleague who put me in touch with Fr. Joe Boland who was experienced in guiding people through the Ignatian exercises. Our initial meeting crystallised for me that it was time to 'move on' even though I did not know what that meant in practical terms. I was then invited by my spiritual director (Joe) to consider whether I wanted to do the exercises in life according to Annotation 19 (Ignatius, 2004, p. 9). I did choose and the exercises became a part of my daily life for a period of six months (SJ, 24.10.2007-22.04.2008). Central to my experience of the exercises was the process of attending to my desires and discerning to what degree they were directed towards freedom to love God our creator. The exercises focused on engaging with biblical texts intelligently and imaginatively encouraging a colloquy - a dialogue with the Lord (Coghlan, 2005, p. 93). Furthermore, it created space for a whole body response as meditation deepened into contemplation (cf. Ivens, 1998, p. 46). Key to my experience was a growing awareness in discerning how God was active in creation and in my own desires. I was discovering how to make choices in freedom in order to act in concert with God's purpose for humanity to love him wholly.

Among the many aspects of discovery through the exercises, two stood out in terms of my other learning. First, Ignatius (2004, p. 68 [230-231]) introduces 'The Contemplation to Attain Love" by stressing that love is expressed in "deeds rather than in words" and that love "consists in mutual communication." This emphasis on love being active and dialogical resonated with the AR trajectory of human flourishing and freedom together with liberation theology, a strand in PT.

Second was the way in which the exercises involved attention to the five senses. Ignatius' emphasis on a somatic spirituality offers one way to realise Graham's (2009, p. 83, italics original) vision of "...a practical theology that tells stories of embodiment [which] can really examine what it might mean for God to be revealed in a human *body*, broken and suffering, whose resurrection proclaims that love is stronger than death." The exercises enlivened my perception of spiritual experience as a meeting of intellect, imagination, and senses with the divine creator in the incarnate Jesus.

I have squeezed the colours onto my pallet. The narrative of discovering an embodied 'doing' orientation to research, theology and spirituality has prepared the ground to explore ART.

ACTION RESEARCH AS A WAY OF DOING THEOLOGY (ART)

Now to unpack what I mean by 'action research as doing theology'. First, what does it mean to speak of 'doing theology'? Then, what sources are there in AR and PT literature to assist in developing ART?

Doing theology

AR in itself is a democratising approach to knowledge. It is an eclectic 'discipline' that encourages ways of knowing in which action-reflection, practice-theory are bound up together. The potential of AR as a way of doing theology is that it opens up beyond the *locus* of theology as a specialist discipline for the select few. It resists the theology of the 'ivory tower' or of preachers declaiming in pulpits 'six feet above contradiction'. As I imagine it, doing theology in the spirit of AR is adopting a perspective that recognises theology is an activity of the whole of life and done by all people in the faith community. It is carried out in a variety of ways both formal and informal. By speaking of 'doing theology' I am expressing the way in which theology is about intentionally exploring our experiences of God in the ordinary and everyday experiences of life which are inevitably shaped by our contexts of formal confessional and religious life (cf. Conde-Frazier, 2014).

Word Café was a particular method I chose as part of the activity of 'doing theology'. It was a way of opening communicative space and creating an arena in which a dialogue about our experience of my practice of preaching the Bible could take place. Both the preaching events and the dialogue in Word Café formed the activity of 'doing theology'. There are other methods that could have been chosen to enable us to reflect intentionally on my preaching practice and yet it was Word Café that seemed a good fit in terms of our AR orientation, the research question, and our resources. It was through the dialogical process of Word Café that we made explicit our already existing 'doing of theology' in my preaching practice which in turn generated themes leading to new actions.

The nature of 'doing theology' is shaped by my view that everything we do expresses our theology. Only as we are able to perceive our theology in practice do we realise the potential for change. Graham (2013b, p. 170, italics original) calls for PT to be more than conduct brought into line with creed: "...practice is understood as a *locus theologicus*; as a source of encounter with and apprehension of God. Reflection on practice is thus primary material for greater knowledge and

understanding of God and a source of insight into the nature of faithful living." AR offers a variety of approaches that foster awareness in practice. This orientation to learning contributes to the manner of doing theology. AR has the potential to offer insight into the theology expressed through our practices and encourages us towards transformation. The reflexivity of AR augments theological reflection through its emphasis on collaborative inquiry. This challenges individualistic modes of theological reflection. The AR orientation requires skills of first person inquiry exercised within communities of practice as a basis for second and third person inquiry. The challenge of AR as a way of 'doing theology' is to extend fluency in the second and third person. The essence of what it is to speak of 'doing theology' is the extent to which it is experiential in nature, encompassing actions and language.

ART is 'doing theology' in a way that is attentive to God revealed in and through the practices of communities whether they are Christian or not. My vision for ART is of a mutual dialogue between AR and PT. It is not dissimilar to Hiltner's (1958, p. 223) call for an extension of Tillich's (1968) method of correlation in theology as "...a full two-way street...." For "If we hold that theology is always assimilation of the faith, not just the abstract idea of the faith apart from its reception, then it becomes necessary to say that culture may find answers to questions raised by faith as well as to assert that faith has answers to questions raised by culture" (1958, p. 223). ART arises out of my Christian conviction that if God is the creator of all things by the Word and through the Spirit, then God is everywhere to be found (cf. Cameron, Reader, Slater, & Rowland, 2012, pp. 1-2). ART is 'doing theology' in the spirit of Paul in the Areopagus in Athens who establishes mutual ground with the Epicerean and Stoic philosophers by drawing upon their sources in an critique of deity being identified with material creations (idols) (Acts 17:27-28). Paul engages in this dialogue convinced of the resurrection and this is the fault line along which further debate is held. ART is 'doing theology' in the public square holding the conviction of our tradition with an openness to the Other. I would further contend that there are sufficient sources in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and from within our variegated faith community traditions inviting us into dialogue with the Other in a spirit of openness and which leads to a revision of *praxis*.

Sources in action research and practical theology for ART

The relationship between these two diverse disciplines is helpfully developed in the work of Coghlan (2004, 2005, 2008a, 2008b). His academic expertise in organisational development integrates with his vocation as a Jesuit priest and his commitment to Ignatian spirituality. He communicates with equal ease in the worlds of AR and Christian spirituality. Furthermore, he engages constructively with the various non-theistic spiritualities present in some AR strands (e.g. Buddhism, Taoism etc...). Yet he "...has no intention of attempting to colonise all such work within a comprehensive theological framework" (Graham, 2013b, p. 174). Instead, he offers a theistic analysis of Ignatian spirituality as an AR approach. Before examining Coghlan's arguments for Ignatian spirituality as a form of action research, I want to set him in the context of four treatments of practical theology which have made an explicit link with AR.

Bruce Martin: AR in a Canadian Baptist congregation

Martin (2000, 2001) is a pastor and academic. He critically analyses the educational and transformational possibilities of AR in congregational contexts through the lens of his own collaboration with his Canadian Baptist congregation. There are a number of things about his engagement with AR that are noteworthy.

First, his understanding of AR is characterised by an implicit appreciative form of inquiry. Through a collaborative process he worked with his congregation to identify areas of practice and understanding that needed to change. He was keen to avoid AR as purely a problem solving approach but also as means of complexification "...as layers of meaning are exposed and new potentialities and possibilities emerge" (2000, pp. 162-164, 2001, p. 262). AR in the congregational context throws up "unexpected challenges" and "new possibilities" (2001, p. 262).

Second, he emphasises the importance of dialogue in the building of faith communities. "Only through authentic self-disclosure - of understandings of the present, memories of the past, and visions for the future - can plans be made and changes enacted. Through honest communication we get to know one another better and can care for one another more effectively" (2000, p. 162). He identifies that this collaborative, dialogical relationship between pastor/teacher and congregation may be problematic for those who exercise authoritarian styles of leadership.

Third, as an action researcher, Martin is clearly 'on the page'. He is a Baptist minister in Edmonton, Canada and gives an account of his encounter with AR in the university setting. His discovery of AR at the University of Alberta led him to engage with his congregation in educating them as to what AR is about. He tells the story of how they responded to the process of change. We know who he is throughout the process: his thrills, struggles, fears, and disappointments as pastor-researcher.

Fourth, as an involved researcher Martin (2001, p. 269) discloses his dissatisfaction with the quality of his "observation" as a researcher. He makes this judgement on the basis of his traditional social science background in which he had been able to act as a dispassionate observer. In the work with his congregation, he confesses that with his leadership team "We struggled to detach our own emotions to hear, genuinely, what was being said and probe more deeply into people's understandings of *their* experiences" (2001, p. 270, italics original). I would argue that AR does not require detachment but awareness both of self and of the other.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Martin uses AR within the congregational context with an assumed theological resonance. "...I perceive no philosophical tension between action research and Christian theology. To the contrary, I see action research as complementary and consistent with Christian theological understandings and convictions" (2001, p. 265). This is the point at which - to borrow Graham's terminology - Martin appears to colonise AR with his theological givens. He equates the theological concept of "servant leadership" with collaboration and co-learning. He asserts that his theological starting point of "gender, ethnic, and social equality" (2001, p. 265) is consistent with the trajectory of AR to empower. He makes a similar move between the biblical image of "salt and light" with "social improvement and transformation" (2001, p. 265). Are the assumptions underpinning the theological themes he has identified and which he seamlessly links to AR sustainable? He does not appear to allow AR to interrogate the theological givens because AR has been subsumed into theology. Nonetheless, Martin is committed to the AR cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting in order to educate and effect change.

Elizabeth Conde-Frazier: Participatory Action Research and practical theology

Conde-Frazier (2006, 2014) is a scholar and teacher who shares Martin's concern for religious education. Whereas Martin's form of AR falls within the 'northern tradition', her commitment is to the 'southern tradition' of PAR. She explicitly construes PAR as PT with the *telos* of social justice. Conde-Frazier does not explicitly define what she means by PT but seems to indicate that it is indistinguishable from PAR. She states that "PAR works with an educational configuration that includes the faith community, the larger community context, and the theological institution" (2006, p. 323). She gives three examples of PAR as PT for social justice: inter-faith dialogue in Pakistan; empowerment of poor women in Korea; and a Samoan church theologically reflecting and socially active (2006, pp. 323-324). She develops the role of the involved researcher attending to the voices of the community according to the theology of incarnation. "It uses a dialogical and hermeneutical approach that is more democratic, humanizing, empowering, and life enhancing" (2006, p. 325). She conjures up an image to capture the nature of PT for social justice: "...living in the borderland between God and the people. It creates a prophetic space where we do not announce and denounce but where we help to bring about alternative practices for more humane living" (2006, p. 326). PAR is defined in theological terms as action into which breaks "...God's kairos and the movement of the spirit" (2006, p. 328). PAR is an activity of discovering truth and making decisions for change, challenging "...us to enliven our spiritual practices..." (2006, p. 328).

In her recent work, Conde-Frazier (2014, p. 234) is transparent about who she is in relation to her "text". She highlights the importance of a theology of "*lo cotidiano*" which means "the everyday" (2014, p. 235). She makes it clear that PAR is an "accompaniment" to PT which "...moves us toward social justice" citing the story of a Latina Pentecostal church collaborating with a school of theology "to craft a participatory action research project" to address access to medical treatment for AIDS patients (2014, p. 237). PAR "...pushes the discipline of practical theology beyond its ordinary boundaries to heal alienation and pursue peace" (2014, p. 242). In contrast to Martin's theologically defined AR, Conde-Frazier's understanding of PT is governed by the liberative and humanising agenda of PAR.

John Swinton & Harriet Mowat: Practical Theology and Qualitative Methodology

"Practical Theology is fundamentally *action* research" declares Swinton and Mowat (2006, p. 255) in the conclusion of their innovative *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. Todd (2007, p. 219) points out that this emphatic statement comes as a "tantalizing" surprise announcement in the conclusion and a bolt "out of the blue". It is evident that AR is not an 'orientation' for them but merely one method among a variety of conceptual approaches in the qualitative research arsenal (2006, p. 50). I would argue that the final participatory research case study reflects their concept of AR. It is clear in the conclusion that AR and participatory research are interchangeable terms (2006, p. 255). Also, AR in relation to PT is governed by an *a priori* theological agenda of "faithfulness" to God (2006, pp. 256-258).

Todd (2007, p. 219) notes a dearth of references to mainstream AR literature. Those to whom they refer are concerned with AR in educational and clinical settings. This limited engagement with the literature is jarring especially so when Swinton and Mowat (2006, p. 256) create an unwarranted division of labour between the problem solving purpose of AR with the "wider theological remit" of PT to "consciousness raising" (without reference to Freire as the progenitor of conscientization!)

In spite of their narrow engagement with AR, they offer a sustained treatment of the theoretical issues which are distinctive to PT and of qualitative research methods and propose a way for these two distinct disciplines to be brought into conversation. In the first three chapters the theoretical foundations are set down followed by five case studies. In their conclusion they claim that PT is "a theology of action" and make the bold claim that AR is "...the underpinning approach to qualitative research" (2006, p. x). The case studies demonstrate a variety of qualitative research methodologies used to research a wide range of theological contexts: mental health and spirituality; a congregation exploring 'emerging church'; chaplaincy; the Church's response to suicide; and the place of those with learning disability within the faith community. Whilst innovative and engaging I would query their concept of AR as the bedrock of a qualitative approach to PT. It seems more accurate to claim that PT is action-orientated and that AR is *one* tool in the qualitative researcher's kit to serve the *telos* of greater faithfulness in the community of faith. Action researchers do not treat AR as a discrete method set alongside "grounded theory, ethnography" as they do (2006, p. 50). Their approach would be better classified as "theological action" (2006, p. 259).

Theological action is evident in the way they orientate the task of PT as performative action and insist on experience as its starting point (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 5). They make explicit their theological assumptions regarding the relationship of qualitative methodologies to PT. PT embodies the givenness of revelation and in turn sets the limits of the contribution of AR to the theological context (cf. Graham, 2013b, p. 160; Todd, 2007, p. 218). Their stance is crystallised here:

> Within the critical conversation which is Practical Theology, we recognise and accept fully that theology has logical priority; qualitative research tells us nothing about the meaning of life, the nature of God, cross, resurrection or the purpose of the universe. Nevertheless, the ways in which that revelation is interpreted, embodied and worked out are deeply influenced by specific contexts and individual and communal histories and traditions (2006, p. 89).

It is apparent that qualitative research (and thus their conceptualisation of AR) is governed by theology. Qualitative research serves the purpose of enabling us to understand the contexts in which we receive this revelation but cannot alter the inalienable givens of theology. Qualitative methods are to be "sanctified" in the service of divine revelation (2006, p. 94).

Theirs is a modified Barthianism based on the work of van Deusen-Hunsinger (1995) in which they locate revelation as external to human experience. They identify what they perceive to be the limitations of van Deusen-Hunsinger's theological model by raising the concern that it is not clear how "accepted interpretations of divine revelation" could be challenged by "particular communities" (2006, p. 88). They seem to be suggesting that there are theological dogmas and practices that appear for all intents and purposes to be orthodox but require "...a hermeneutic of suspicion as to whether or not our interpretation of revelation is pure, faithful or otherwise" (2006, p. 89). They are keen to emphasise that every Practical Theologian has a faith commitment which is bound up in their context and that the quality of "self-awareness and reflexivity" facilitates the distinction between the givenness of revelation and that which is a social construct (2006, p. 89). Given the priority of PT, it would seem that the purpose of using qualitative methods in self-reflexivity is for the purpose of ascertaining greater levels of faithfulness to revealed truth. The authority of revelation lies in its givenness.

In order to explain the relationship between revelation and experience they employ the metaphor of the script of a play. Performers interpret the script in a

variety of ways and ad-lib. However "...there remains a fundamental plot, structure, storyline and outcome without which it would be unrecognizable" (2006, pp. 4-5). The "'stage whisperer'" is there to keep the performer on script. They propose that PT is governed by the "script of revelation given to us in Christ" and at the same time is attentive to interpenetration with "the life and practices" of the Church and the world (2006, p. 5).

Swinton and Mowat's insistence on the logical priority of PT whilst straining to endow qualitative research methodologies with critical bite "...produces something of a tension" (Todd, 2007). Whilst they have identified the limitations of van Deusen-Hunsinger's model, they create a paradoxical relationship between revelation and human experience. I am left to wonder how it is that authentic revelation is ascertained and by whom. Indeed, if this can be identified, is it the role of qualitative methodologies to be employed only insofar as they ferret out 'unfaithful' interpretations of revelation leaving orthodoxy untouched? It seems to me that at least van Deusen-Hunsinger's model is clear about the priority of theology in the dialogue with non-theological disciplines whereas Swinton and Mowat's hermeneutical approach to social research creates an intractable relationship between the unyielding script and careful improvisation (cf. Graham, 2013b, p. 160). They appear to sense this problem by protesting that "...it is not inconsistent to suggest that even when given logical priority, theology itself can be and indeed should be the subject of critical reflection and challenge" (2006, p. 90).

Despite these criticisms it should not detract from their attempt to establish a dialogue from within their faith commitment. Without doubt their commitment to action and experience as the *locus* of PT is evident. What is problematic is their understanding that "Taking human experience seriously does not imply that experience is a source of revelation" (2006, p. 5) and it is this that calls into question their understanding of AR. In Graham's view their portrayal of AR "...falls some way short of the radical epistemology of action research, in which 'practice' is not simply a matter of technique but a source of meaning and disclosure" (2013b, p. 161). This is consistent with her vision of PT in which experience is disclosive of meaning. It is Swinton and Mowat's insistence on the logical priority of revelation which skews their version of AR. For them PT is tasked with "*critical faithfulness*" which occurs as it offers "*hospitality*" to the critique of qualitative research methodologies which must undergo "*conversion*" (2006, pp. 91-94, italics original).

Conversion describes qualitative research methodologies being brought into the service of revelation, offering a critique "...*from the inside* and not as outsiders" (2006, p. 93, italics original). They do this in order to preserve PT from relativism. Todd (2007, p. 218) attempts to allay this fear arguing that "...it is in taking the risk of thinking as a social scientist that we become open to a deeper critique of our theology. This need not lead necessarily to relativism....but could provide something of a side-light on God's continuing revelation in and through human society."

Helen Cameron and team: Theological all the way through

Talking about God in Practice was presented by Cameron *et al.* (2010, pp. 2, 155) as the book before the monograph (which has yet to appear). It is as an interim report on the project Action Research: Church and Society (ARCS) which expressly seeks to develop Swinton and Mowat's assertion that PT is AR (2010, p. 39). This is the first in depth treatment of AR and PT in the English speaking world for, as Graham cites, this dialogue is well established in the French language (2013b, p. 158).

Their method is called Theological Action Research (TAR) and is a form of inquiry that is "theological all the way through" (2010, p. 51). By this they are contending that the practices of the Christian community are "bearers of theology" and are expressive of a "living Christian tradition" (2010, p. 51). TAR refuses the bifurcation between theology as words and discipleship as action (2010, p. 14). Instead, "Practical theology's task is to make practice more theological - and in that way it makes theology more practical" (2010, p. 17). The aim of TAR is to nurture "theological fluency" which is the "art" of weaving together skills, speech and thought in a way that is theological all the way through. This is rooted in the conviction that "...words and actions do not simply exist side by side; they co-inhere" (2010, p. 14).

Graham (2013b, p. 161) observes the shared missiological intent of Swinton and Mowat's (2006, p. 27) faithful participation "in God's mission" with TAR's commitment "to renew both theology and practice in the service of God's mission" (Cameron, et al., 2010, p. 63). Graham (2013b, pp. 162-163) suggests that TAR's concern with the *missio Dei* has an apologetic dimension. Culture has become alienated from its springhead in Christianity. "And when our talk about God - our theology - loses social traction, mission too falls into crisis" (2010, p. 12). The aim

of TAR is to increase theological fluency in faith communities in order to enable greater confidence in engaging in God talk that may be more readily heard and understood by society. The dialogue between PT and other disciplines is to be conducted in a spirit of mutual learning without "...doing violence to either its own particular integrity, or that of its conversation partners" (2010, p. 32).

Cameron *et al.* give attention both to PT and AR. In contrast to Swinton and Mowat's broad brush stroke treatment of AR, they offer a succinct overview of this orientation to research grounded in key texts within the literature. They note the similarities between the action-reflection cycles of theological reflection and action research which form the basis for the TAR model of moving through experience, reflection, learning and action (2010, p. 50). This reflective inquiry is aided by their concept of 'The Four voices of Theology': normative theology (scripture, creeds, official church teaching, liturgies); formal theology (academic); espoused theology (what a faith community says it believes); operant theology (the theology embedded in the practices of a faith community) (2010, p. 54).

Their positive stance towards AR is tempered by what they perceive to be its limitations: highly contextual and thus refusing to universalise research insights; it brackets out values and opts for 'what works'; it is co-opted to maintain the status quo rather than further democracy; it demands time to foster trust in relationships (2010, pp. 42-44). Their assertion that AR excludes values is surprising in that AR insists that all practice is value-laden. It is governed by the values of *praxis* driven knowledge generation arising from collaborative learning that fosters democracy, human flourishing, and liberation. Sound AR does not ignore "the espoused value base of the organisations taking part" (2010, p. 43).

Cameron's team appear to view AR principally in organisational terms and this is reflected in the three case studies (Anglican Parish, Roman Catholic Diocese, and Housing Justice) which demonstrate the TAR method. Action researchers grapple with the insider-outsider positionality though there is a recognition that it is a spectrum that is to be negotiated through self-awareness (e.g. - Herr & Anderson, 2005). TAR recognises the complexity of positionality and yet goes on to develop firmly defined insider-outsider teams in their model (2010, p. 74). In this schema, the outsider team challenges the insiders and is composed of those with expertise both in PT and AR. Though they are at pains to stress that the outsider teams are involved as participants "not as experts" it is hard to escape the division build into

the model (2010, p. 75). Why is it necessary to have 'formal' theologians and trained qualitative researchers if they are not fulfilling the role of the 'expert'?

A striking feature in AR literature is the heuristic concept of first, second and third person inquiry. It is briefly elucidated with the explanation that the ARCS projects had not intended "...to mirror these three descriptions, but there are some resonances with the ways in which the projects developed" (2010, p. 41). It is not grasped that the three modes of inquiry are more than descriptions. AR whether in the first, second or third person requires the practitioner to be skilled in first person inquiry practices, the core of which is self-reflexivity. First person inquiry is the pebble dropped into the glassy pond which ripples into second and third person inquiry (cf. Brydon-Miller, 2008, p. 204).

The team rightly point out a potential risk in PAR in that it easily "...becomes consultancy and is about 'empowering', suggesting that power remains outside the community and is offered on the basis that it can be withdrawn again" (2010, p. 43). There is some irony in this observation as TAR's own division of labour between the insider-outsider teams and the focus on organisational matters gives the impression of consultancy. This sense of an external team of expert theologians and social science researchers was perceived by the Housing Justice group as having "outsourced theology" (2010, p. 128). The ARCS team identified this as a moment of insight though their proposed intervention of positioning the "capacity-building workshop" early in the process appears to be a proposed intervention from the outsider team (2010, p. 136). It is not clear to me that there was collaboration with the insider group to address the dichotomy. Though the case studies clearly demonstrate that theological learning took place, this inherent division of labour between insiders and outsiders combined with the absence of first person inquiry, causes me to ask: how, apart from the emphasis on theology, is TAR distinctive from a consultancy using qualitative methodologies? The full potential of AR and PT is curbed because it patently "...fails to address the 'positionality' of Cameron *et al.*, who remain resolutely 'off the page' in terms of any declaration or exploration of their own reflexivity" (Graham, 2013b).

The team that developed TAR offer an exciting and innovative approach to practice that is theological all the way through. It was an ecumenical effort though all of the key players fall within ecclesial traditions with a high commitment to the givenness of theology via creeds and statements of faith (Roman Catholic, Anglican,

Salvation Army). This necessarily limits receptivity to the critical voice of AR. They offer an invitation "...to the reader to develop and refine the work we have done" (2010, p. 154). Subsequently, they have established the Theological Action Research Network (TARN) to enable action researchers (who are not necessarily practical theologians) and practical theologians to dialogue and develop the model.

David Coghlan: perched on the boundaries

"My lifeworld in academic life finds me perched on the boundaries of applied behavioural science and a sense of religious ministry in that life" (Coghlan, 2003). There are four strands in Coghlan's (2003, pp. 1-4) spiritual and academic formation that weave together to create the diversity in his approach to inquiry. The first came out of participation in "encounter groups" combined with becoming familiar with Rogers' work. This involved an encounter with self and others through exchanging insights, sharing feelings and learning the skill of "active listening". The second strand was through critical engagement with Lonergan, a Canadian philosopher and theologian, who developed an empirical approach to the processes of the human being as knower. The third strand is deeply embedded in his Roman Catholic Christian faith and as a Jesuit priest immersed in the ways of Ignatian spirituality. Lonergan too drew upon this same spirituality (2003, p. 2). He points out that though Ignatian spirituality is rooted in Roman Catholicism it has come to be used by other streams of Christianity and those of other faiths (2005, p. 93). I would add that it engages with those who have no faith commitment. Coghlan is immersed in an inclusive Ignatian vision of human beings acting in the world together with God who is active in the world. Transformation occurs through personal acknowledgement of sin and reception of forgiveness and discerning how a person's desires fulfil the purposes of God. His articulation of his spirituality has the ring of a fairly traditional expression of faith. Yet this does not prevent Coghlan (2003, p. 2) from framing his theological understanding with AR language: "...I am desirous to respond to Jesus Christ who calls me to collaborate with him." It is when he crosses the border towards the fourth strand that he describes his position as 'perching'. This does not seem to present an impossible tension but rather an attitude of hospitality toward forms of human knowing that are not explicitly Christian or 'spiritual'. This strand encompasses his induction into and sustained engagement with Organisational Development and his discovery of Lewin and AR. The coming together of these

various strands is part of a process in which he eventually "...fitted the pieces together and reflected on how my formation was grounded in working from experience and in a way of being which both inquired into experience and attended to the process of inquiry" (2003, p. 4). He argues that the roots of action research are in "...Catholic social action and liberation theology...' (2005, p. 94) which has also been foundational in the development of practical theology (cf. Ballard & Pritchard, 2006, pp. 5, 71, 82; Green, 2009, p. viii; Pattison, 1994, 2000a, pp. 103, 241).

Writing to those within the faith community he gives an overview of the nature of AR (2004, 2008b). It is principally knowledge generated out of practices which have to do with everyday living. Acknowledging that it is a diverse field he identifies five key characteristics: knowledge in action, practical knowing, participatory and democratic, human flourishing, and emergent-evolving (2008b, pp. 214-215). In AR knowing pushes beyond the limits of ideas about the world to knowledge created by actors and agents of change (2008b, p. 214).

Coghlan's (2004, p. 97) fluency in both tongues of AR and Ignatian spirituality seems to spring from a confidence that because God is creator of all things "God can be sought and found in our own experience." "Ignatius spoke of finding God in all things" and it is this conviction that facilitates a firm faith commitment whilst at the same time fully engaging with AR (2005, p. 95). He pinpoints the increased attention that has been given to spirituality by social scientists despite the lack of consensus in how to define what it is. He highlights the non-theistic spiritualities within AR literature (e.g. Buddhism, transpersonal etc...) (2005, p. 90). He commits himself to a definition that grounds his interdisciplinary approach to spirituality: "...a fundamental dimension of the human person that is oriented towards transcendence, is lived experience and is an academic discipline" (2005, p. 90; cf. 2008b, p. 211). The common "methodology" of AR and researching spirituality is the "experiential" (2005, p. 90).

Coghlan communicates to his own theological tradition and to the AR community with humility. In particular, he avoids theological imposition of Ignatian spirituality over and against the AR orientation. This is evident when he proffers to the Jesuit community "...that Ignatian spirituality promotes a form of what is now known as *action research*" because of the AR commitment to the indivisible nature of research occurring within "ongoing action" (2004, p. 97, italics original). In his assertion that Ignatian spirituality is a type of AR he avoids an overarching claim on

AR. He is not suggesting that all AR is Ignatian spirituality nor that it should be so. In addressing himself to the AR community he offers the insight of Ignatian spirituality to AR "...undertaken in the spirit of Christian faith" (2005, p. 95). He explicitly recognises that the methodology of Ignatian spirituality in the context of AR "...is not for everyone" (2005, p. 104). He departs from the aforementioned approaches to theology and AR in which theology, however receptive to AR, remains the dominant voice in the dialogue. He demonstrates respect for the integrity of both disciplines whilst acknowledging the complexities involved in establishing a dialogue between what might be regarded as alien approaches. The conversation is fraught with the danger of dismissing the other and claiming a superior position. Coghlan's (2004, p. 108; cf. 2008b, p. 221) commitment to the mutuality of the dialogue is rooted in the hope that "If the two traditions can converse and cross-fertilise, the fruit may well be both abundant and rich."

This optimism is laudable in its determination to resist diminishing the distinctive and yet related approaches to action learning. However, it appears to me that whilst Coghlan has comprehensively identified the potential for mutual dialogue, he has not identified areas of fundamental tension. Coghlan consistently articulates the Ignatian metanarrative that sits within an orthodox expression of the Christian faith. The many and varied members of the AR family including those who adopt an overt non-theistic spirituality, are resistant to any type of universal truth claim and would thus be reluctant to engage with an Ignatian and Christian worldview. Equally, though guides within the Ignatian spiritual tradition tend to hold an inclusive and broadminded stance towards those of all faiths and none, there most certainly would be suspicion amongst many Christians towards what might be perceived as the apparent pluralism expressed in AR. Alarm may be deepened by AR spiritualities that appear to be a mishmash of practices floating free from their communal sources (e.g. Heron & Lahood, 2008). Graham (2013b, p. 173) draws out the implications of rootlessness: "Action research writers' evocation of spirituality is therefore problematic in its somewhat eclectic and uncritical appropriation of a wide range of cultures, historical epochs and perspectives." Coghlan's approach opens up the possibility of Ignatian spirituality being authentic to its own tradition and welcoming AR as a way of interrogating what is inauthentic in those who participate in the practices of this community. Equally, AR approaches that randomly draw together multifarious spiritual practices apart from indigenous communities of

practice could rightly be critiqued for failing to attend to the historical and social sources of such spiritualities.

The spiritual dimension explored by some action researchers and that of Ignatian spirituality share the common conviction that action is integral to understanding. Action and reflection and action and prayer are inextricably bound up in the process of transformation. The trajectory of both disciplines is change. Coghlan (2005, p. 91) perceives congruency between AR and Ignatian spirituality because "Research into one's spirituality is potentially personally transforming." It is first person transformation that is the foundation of both action research and spiritual inquiry.

This is not to say that he limits the nature of inquiry to a kind of individualistic interiority. Far from it. He is clear that first person inquiry is set within a wider context of interpersonal relationships. It is desirable for first and second person learning to ripple outwards into third person inquiry which he identifies as "...the dissemination of the research to the impersonal world" (2003, p. 5). Yet it is his qualification of what constitutes the best form of third person research which is telling: "Its most authentic form is where it emerges from the explicit accounts of first and second practice" (2003, p. 5). In other words, the highest form of research is produced by researchers who are self-reflexive in relation to others.

Coghlan (2004, 2005, 2008b) demonstrates the way in which Ignatian spirituality entails first, second, and third person inquiry. In broadest terms, first person inquiry occurs "Whenever believing Christians seek to find God in their lives" (2005, p. 99; 2008b, p. 218; cf. 2004, p. 105). Typically, an individual chooses to undertake the spiritual exercises in order to discern the way in which God is acting in them and calling them to act with him in the world. Adopting the AR concepts of inquiring "'upstream'" and "'downstream'", he elucidates the motions involved in the exercises. The former term describes the first person activity of questioning "...our basic assumptions, desires, intentions and philosophy of life" (2004, p. 104) . The latter indicates the way in which "...we inquire into our behaviour, ways of relating, and action in the world" (2004, p. 104). He notes that first person inquiry is characteristically expressed in reflective journals, attending critically to every aspect of life. Due to the importance of a dream in my own

inquiry (Chapter 5), it is worth mentioning that he singles out "records of dreams" as fodder for first person inquiry (2004, p. 104).

He elucidates the purpose of journal keeping when he refers to Ignatius' *Autobiography* as a means through which "...he saw the patterns of God's action, and that insight directed him to future action" (2004, p. 104). Those who undertake the exercises are encouraged to keep a diary of their experiences in order to discern the movements of God's grace in their lives.

Part of the exercises is asking for the grace I wish to receive and through the exercises to notice how God has given the grace for which I asked. A crucial part of the exercises is the practice of the daily Examen. Coghlan (2004, p. 105) succinctly summarises the nature of the exercise:

> We recall the experiences of the day; we notice our responses and probe what was happening within us, what God might have been telling us in a particular incident; we wonder about what we might do next - whether to repent, to give thanks, or to take some further action. We look not only at the immediate details, but also at their motivational roots. The process moves freely between the two: 'upstream' from action to motivation, and 'downstream' from reflection to thoughts about how I might do something new.

In this way the individual develops attentional skills enabling awareness of their own desires and actions and the extent to which they are collaborating with God's actions and purposes for them.

Our quest for God is first person inquiry and becomes second-person inquiry through "...participation in a community of faith..." (2008b, p. 218; cf. 2004, pp. 105-106; 2005, pp. 101-102). This can take many forms ranging from involvement in church life, a religious order, or a small group formed for spiritual support. For those who participate in the spiritual exercises they are guided by a spiritual director and in partnership they "...explore the individual's experience; what it might mean for the individual and what the individual might choose to do" (2008b, p. 219). Second person inquiry in spirituality creates a dialogical space created for the purpose of discernment.

As noted already, Coghlan (2005, pp. 98, 102) construes third person inquiry as "impersonal" dissemination of knowledge through "...reporting, publishing and extrapolating from the concrete to a general audience that others may adopt and internalize their own application and developments". The *telos* of spirituality and in particular Ignatian spirituality is missional "...in the corporate life of the Church and

in the progress of the planet as a whole" (2005, p. 102; cf. 2004, p. 107; 2008b, p. 219). Mission is conceived of as all encompassing including individual and community spiritual formation together with ecclesial organisational development and issues of justice and environmental responsibility.

Being articulate in the three voices involves skilful use of a grammar of action and reflection which are essential to spirituality and action inquiry. Coghlan (2005, p. 95, 2008b, p. 215) correlates AR with the Ignatian spiritual exercises, which is in its essence prayer and action, and the wider discipline of spirituality without collapsing one into the other. It is his contention that with Ignatian spirituality and AR "...each contributes to the other" (2005, p. 95). With regard to AR and the broader stable of spirituality it is clear that he seeks to instigate a "conversation" between these "two traditions" (2008b, p. 221). The grammar involved in speaking in the three voices requires familiarity with three conceptual competencies developed in AR: action-reflection cycles, extended epistemology, and four territories of experience.

Proficiency in the three voices comes through the use of the AR cycle. His description of the action reflection cycle begins with a 'pre-step' of setting the inner ("dispositions") and outer ("social" and purposive) context and is followed by experience, reflection, action and evaluation (2005, p. 96). This cycle moves in a spiral with forward motion. The AR cycles bear close resemblance to the various prayer in action spiritual approaches, including the Ignatian exercises (2005, p. 95, 2008b, p. 216). Furthermore, in theological reflection, there are numerous examples of pastoral cycles which bear close resemblance to the AR cycle (e.g. Ballard & Pritchard, 2006; Green, 2009; Lartey, 2000). Intentional engagement with such reflective cycles allows an individual or a group to analyse experience and move into new actions frame by frame. This fosters a *habitus* of self-reflexive action in the moment.

Fluency in the three voices involves an extended epistemology (Coghlan, 2004, pp. 101-102, 2005, pp. 96-97, 2008b, pp. 215-216). The concept has been developed by Heron, Reason, and Torbert (1996; 2006, 2008; 2001). There are four different forms of knowledge. Experiential knowing encompasses our direct interaction with the realities of life. In terms of spirituality this kind of knowing is through experiences of faith and prayer. Presentational knowing is the manner of expressing those things which have occurred in our experience. Tools of

presentation include writing, artwork, music, drama and so on. Relating this to spirituality Coghlan relates this to 'images of God', liturgical prayer, and religious art, music, and poetry. Propositional knowing is the expression of ideas through the written word. In spirituality Coghlan identifies this mode of knowledge in terms of written formulations of faith through creeds and theological writings. It is interesting that he does not include scripture in either the presentational or propositional forms of knowing. It would seem pivotal to include the biblical texts in both of these forms of knowing, especially in view of the central role that scripture plays within the exercises. The final aspect of this extended epistemology is practical knowing. This is the weaving together of experiential, presentational and propositional knowing into action. Practical knowing is "...doing appropriate things, skilfully and competently" (2004, p. 102, 2005, p. 97, 2008b, p. 215). In terms of spiritual formation this is all the elements of the Christian faith being lived out in practice.

The grammar of the three voices is nuanced further through four territories of experience: intentions, planning, action and outcomes (Coghlan, 2008b, p. 97; Reason & Torbert, 2001). Each territory facilitates increasing awareness of experiences. Intentions are to do with the values and aspirations that motivate us and give us purpose. Planning has to do with calculating how we will achieve our aims and objectives which spring out of our intentions. Actions encompass all performances in everyday life flowing out of the values which shape our motives and strategising. Outcomes describe the effects that our actions have in the world. Coghlan notes the way in which these territories may be explored in different ways, sometimes beginning with outcomes and analysing how our actions lead to the results (single loop learning). We may decide to push back further into an exploration of our intentions and plans to see how these shape our outcomes (double loop learning). Inquiry could deepen into third loop learning by teasing out the values and aspirations that shape our intentions (2005, p. 98). The Ignatian exercises are concerned with the discernment of desires and the extent to which our desires resonate or clash with God's desires. Coghlan relates the territories of experience and in particular exploring intentions and motives with the way in which "...Ignatian spirituality typically encourages us to become aware of how our behaviour and its results are rooted in our intentions and desires" (2004, p. 103). As with the territories of experience, Ignatian spirituality invites differing approaches. Sometimes the process of prayer and reflection begins with experiences and through

articulation of what happened discerning the true nature of our desires. At other times we will begin with our desires or motivations and seek to discern how to act (2008b, p. 217).

Integrating this extended epistemology with working across the different territories of experience in first, second and third person inquiry is further complexified by the dimensions of past, present and future (Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Coghlan, 2005, pp. 101-102, 2008b, p. 219). In a rather complex proposal Chandler and Torbert (2003, p. 135) argue for 27 different "flavors [sic]" or "modes" of research that yield richer insight into human relatedness. They explain the significance of working in the three tenses: "In action research, timely action in the present, transforming historical patterns into future possibilities, is the ultimate aim and achievement" (2003, p. 135). This integration of time, voice and practice is part of the "action turn" in which there is no bifurcation "...between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action" (Reason & Torbert, 2001, p. 6). This is skilful action in the moment pregnant with possibilities for transformation in generating knowledge and new/renewed practices.

The points of resonance between spirituality (in particular Ignatian) and AR are enriched by Coghlan's engagement with Lonergan (1972). Building on Lonergan's work he seeks to develop the idea of authenticity through the practice of first-person inquiry. Lonergan, a theologian and a philosopher, proposes three questions for gaining insight: "What am I doing when I am knowing? Why is that knowing? What do I know when I do that?" (2008a, p. 354) He identifies the points on the reflective cycle as "...a dynamic, heuristic three step process: experience, understanding and judgement" which leads to decision making (2008a, p. 355). Coghlan (2008a, p. 356) points out that Lonergan's process complements an extended epistemology and the territories of experience.

Lonergan argues that all knowing is an involving, self-implicating process, refusing the notion of a division between objective and subjective as separate activities of knowledge. Instead every moment of life is experienced as indivisible subjective-objective reality, "...complementary, not opposed" (Longergan in Coghlan, 2008a, p. 356). He construes the nature of objectivity as an awareness of self as distinct from others. Authenticity is the resonance between the interior and external world and of being able to "...distinguish between the knower and the known" (2008a, p. 356). This kind of awareness leads to a form of critical

subjectivity in which I am aware of the way in which my perceptions of the world converge and diverge from those of others (2008a, p. 356).

Lonergan's initial concern with 'insight' was given greater depth as he turned "...to a focus on meaning, value, loving, and acting" (Coghlan, 2008a, p. 357). On the basis of these values he developed what he described as 'transcendental precepts' which form the basis for authenticity. Each of the precepts corresponds to the cognitive process of decision making: be attentive (to experience/data); be intelligent (in understanding/inquiry); be reasonable (in making judgements); be responsible (in taking decisions to act) (Lonergan, 1972, pp. 14-15). These are modes of being towards which we aspire as self-reflexive practitioners (Coghlan, 2008a, pp. 359-360). Authenticity is not a static condition but involves continuous critical reflection in which we question our motives and values in action. This involves "...adopting a hermeneutic of suspicion. Don't accept anyone's word at face value. Question your own thoughts, feelings, and subjectivity" (2008a, p. 362). The moment we cease to interrogate ourselves in relation to the world around us is when we risk succumbing to complacency in which we become blind to our decision making processes in relation to others and thus become inauthentic. Lonergan terms this inattentiveness as "alienation" (1972, p. 55).

Coghlan (2003) builds upon Lonergan's conceptualisation of authenticity in such a way that he is able to practice the AR orientation out of his own commitment to Ignatian spiritual practices. He describes this as "perched" on the boundaries between two different disciplines. This image suggests to me a kind of balancing. Is this a precarious teetering in which there is the threat of falling into one camp or the other? Or is it a location of non-commitment in which at any given moment some type of unsettlement will spur flight in one direction or the other? For Coghlan, it would seem that perching is skilled balancing grounded in the values of both his religious and AR communities. Whilst 'perching' might be suggestive of a non-committal, superficial stance towards the two traditions, it could equally express a dialectic tension inherent in being located - or rooted - in two distinct *habitus*. Whereas AR spiritualities tend to scavenge from various traditions, Coghlan's spirituality springs from commitment to the practices of a coherent tradition. Graham (2013b, p. 175) suggests that his approach "...argues that for action researchers, such a connection to a definable and living spiritual tradition offers a structured and extant discipline that addresses the processes of experiential knowing that is fully integrated

into a living tradition of religious values." She perceives that such grounding in a particular faith community connects with the values of AR (e.g. human flourishing) into a "...deeper dimension by linking it into the nature of the divine" (2013b, p. 175). So this 'perching' on the boundary of AR and an explicitly Christian spirituality is an intentional dialectical stance in which from the perspective of Ignatian spirituality is a 'grounded openness' to the insights and critique of AR. What is not clear to me is whether Coghlan understands Ignatian spirituality and the broad stable of Christian spiritual tradition as being open to revision through the insights and challenges of AR.

SOURCES FOR NEGOTIATING THE BOUNDARIES IN ART

In the light of Coghlan's 'grounded openness', how is it possible for an action researcher who is also a practical theologian to perch skilfully on the borders of two multifarious disciplines? What epistemological framework enables the negotiation between two approaches that overlap in significant ways and yet, at the same time embody distinct approaches to the question of spirituality? Put simply, is it possible for an action researcher to be Christian without the intention of 'Christianising' AR?

For both the action researcher operating out of a set of theological commitments and for the practical theologian seeking to learn from the AR orientation, it is essential for there to be self-aware grounding in a *habitus*. Both for the practical theologian intentionally participating in an AR orientation and for the action researcher rooted in a Christian tradition, Graham proposes that the task is one of "...schooling people in the well-springs of tradition from which practical wisdom flows" (2013b, p. 178). But what of the action researcher who is not rooted in a Christian tradition? The non-Christian action researcher's task will not be to 'school people in the well-springs of tradition' if they have no faith commitment. Perhaps then, it is for the action researcher with a faith commitment to embody it and to challenge action researchers with non-theistic spiritualities to pursue their practices in such a way that is grafted into the living practices of particular social contexts in which values are shared and enacted. The insight of the action researcher within a faith tradition is to encourage action inquiry to move beyond superficial eclecticism of spiritualities. Such pick and mix approaches by AR spiritualities risks colonising practices and tearing them from their contexts of *praxis*.

Having unfolded Coghlan's distinctive approach I make a couple of observations. First, it is evident in his treatment of AR and Ignatian spirituality that 'perching' on the borders of these overlapping and yet distinct territories is enriching. He is equally at ease with his Christian faith and calling as with his academic practice of organisational development. There appears to be a genuine mutuality in the dialogue and he recognises that his articulation of Ignatian spirituality as a form of action inquiry will not be universally welcomed by the AR community. His manner of instigating the dialogue is indicative of how PT could position itself in relation to AR. In particular, for someone such as me who participates in the AR orientation and in a congregationally ordered Christian community, AR offers a way for me to 'do theology'.

Second, though Coghlan comfortably inhabits the interdisciplinarity of his practice, he does not explicitly explore how he navigates the epistemological tensions arising from his academic pursuit of AR and his immersion within his faith tradition. It is true that he has outlined the epistemological framework for AR and Ignatian spirituality, placing each in historical context. He has shown the resonances between the two disciplines and made clear the limitations of the assumptions and framework of Ignatian spirituality for those committed to the AR orientation. What requires further development in my view, is the specific issue of how Ignatian spirituality alongside other Christian spiritualities maintain integrity to the existing traditions and practices of the community whilst engaging with the AR orientation which, at least among many of its streams, is highly resistant or even hostile to any kind of universalising metanarrative.

The challenge has been expressed as 'blurred encounters' in Reader's (2005) book bearing this phrase as its title. The jointly authored *Theological reflection for human flourishing* (Cameron, et al., 2012) borrowed Reader's concept as the framing metaphor for a two day event. The conference engaged two groups (Christians in church-based practice and those in non-church/Christian settings) in an intentional process of theological reflection. Blurred encounters occur on a number of boundaries. The one that is pertinent to this discussion is the boundary which separates the disciplines:

> Some theological reflection is all too eager to 'close the loop' as quickly as possible by bringing its own traditional resources into the equation... Theology either has to have all the answers or to have the final word (Cameron, et al., 2012, p. 24).

Reader (2012, p. 26) is clear that for a "genuine blurred encounter" to take place it is essential that both disciplines participating in the dialogue are open to the insights of the other and prepared to be changed. Those of faith who are involved in this conversation may consider this a "...compromise, or it might be part of a process of negotiation whereby a new truth emerges from the process itself" (2012, p. 26). Any dialogue in which a discipline has the upper hand over the other he describes as "...an 'ethics of appropriation', or an imperialistic approach to the encounter" (2012, p. 26 quoting Reader, 2005). An authentic 'blurred encounter' requires openness to the possibility of revising long held beliefs and practices in the light of the perspective of the other discipline.

I consider two aspects of this book. First, this demonstration of theological reflection produced a surprise for the researchers. It highlighted the reluctance of practitioners to draw upon the Bible as a source for theological reflection. The authors acknowledge "...this issue could be viewed as a derailment" (2012, p. 119). Second, the exploration of 'blurred encounters' (or the experiences brought by the practitioners), did not engage with the tools of relevant disciplines (e.g. psychology, social sciences, organisational theory etc...) in the kind of depth which would be sufficient to show how a genuine two way dialogue takes place. This reveals one of the great challenges of being engaged in interdisciplinary activities such as theological reflection: it demands considerable familiarity with a variety of specialisms. Without a working knowledge of the Christian traditions (e.g. biblical knowledge) or a basic suite of skills in psychology and social sciences, there is a danger that we cobble together our insight and plan of action with a kind of shoddiness that may lead to well intended and yet disastrous consequences.

Without doubt there is an enormous challenge entailed in working between different disciplines. It is Graham's (2005, pp. 192-196) development of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* which potentially offers a way to navigate the borderland between AR and PT. Bourdieu responds to "the most ruinous" polarisation in sociology between "objectivism" and "subjectivism" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 25). He sets out a sociological methodology intended to transcend "social physics" and "social phenomenology" through his theoretical conception of *habitus*: a dialectic of the material world and the reproduction of social relations (1992, p. 140). Every human being is born into a *habitus*, entering an embodied social context in which there is an inherited set of communal practices. We iterate practices by reproducing the status

quo and at times producing innovations of practices. Graham (2002, pp. 102-103) encapsulates Bourdieu's (1992, p. 57) concept: "*Habitus* is thus conceived as the residuum of past actions, a deposit of past knowledge and practice, but which is always available as the raw material for creative agency, or 'regulated improvisations'." On this basis, she envisions that the practices of Christian communities are disclosive of their inherited traditions. These may either be preserved by the pressures of ideology or renewed and transformed through encounter with alterity.

Graham's radical postfoundational approach to pastoral-practical theology could be construed as being iconoclastic. This, I believe, would be to misunderstand her approach. Her conceptualisation of *habitus* affirms the traditions of Christian communities whilst inviting the kind of reflexivity in *praxis* that allows for reconfiguration (Graham, et al., 2005, p. 194). Thus, "Pastoral practice constitutes the *habitus* of faith; it is both inherited and indwelt but also infinitely creative: a performative practical wisdom (*phronesis*) which we inhabit and re-enact" (Graham, 2009, p. 158). The manner of the evolution of the *habitus* of faith is a dialogic of practice in which norms are "...provisional - yet binding" (Graham, 2002, p. 6, 2009, p. 158). So it is that from within the Christian tradition Graham proposes the notion of transcendence not as a fixed, revealed reality in which it is our only task as humans to apprehend this truth. Her understanding is that "...the Divine dimension of human experience and practices rests in alterity, provisionality and self-abandonment" (2002, p. 207). It is against this 'horizon' of transcendence that Graham (2002, p. 210) views the task of pastoral-practical theology remaining alert to "the imperatives of hope and obligation" in the shaping and re-shaping of the *praxis* of Christian communities. It is out of her embeddedness within the *habitus* of the Christian tradition that her evocation of God revealed in practice is one of radical challenge, calling for improvisation in the practices of pastoral-practical theology which challenge the grand narrative of Christian faith. This results in an inevitable tension between inheriting the norms of the *habitus* of faith and issuing the challenge to improvise. It is worth noting that Graham's *locus* of improvisation is *praxis* compared with Swinton and Mowat's improvisation of a script of revelation.

A critique of her position necessarily entails an exploration of her notion of transcendence and her identification of the values of hope and obligation (2002, p. 15). There are two questions: How has she decided upon hope and obligation as the

imperatives to be "...reconstructed out of fragments of pluralism and difference"? Also, on what basis is the mystery of transcendence made apparent?

First, Graham announces *hope* and *obligation* as the values worthy of human aspiration but does not explain why or how she makes this choice.[3] What is clear is that these are not derived from a foundationalist perspective but arise out of critical reflexivity of the practices of the community. Hope and obligation are directed towards transformation and an opening out to "a larger vision yet to come" (2002, p. 210). This process of nurturing the wisdom of faith communities is necessarily provisional and intentionally open to new insight through attention to the margins.

Graham (2002, p. 154) builds on Benhabib's (1992) development of Habermas' ideal speech community, distinguishing between a generalised Other (universal human being) and a concrete Other (particular human being in all distinctiveness and diversity) (cf. G. Adams, 2010, pp. 11-12). Ideal speech occurs through sustained dialogue based on our common humanity and yet engaged with the particular humans who are different from us (cf. 1994, p. 135).

Second, for Graham, the mystery of Divine as transcendent is disclosed in the immanency of practice. She roots this in her broader consideration of the place of practice within social science. She asserts that practice "mediates" between structuralist and phenomenological approaches and thus "Such a focus avoids rooting the values of hope and obligation in a metaphysical extra-cultural realm, but rather allows us to plot the dynamics of the ways in which purposeful practices are the implicit bearers of ultimate truth-claims" (2002, p. 97). She proposes a pastoral-practical theology of '*critical phenomenology*' which is a process of "...studying a living and acting faith-community in order to excavate and examine the norms which inhabit pastoral *praxis*" (2002, p. 140, italics original). In this way she frames a pastoral-practical theology which resists universalising and thus absolutist visions of God. She is clear that "...without practice, without narrative and culture, without incarnation, there can be no talk of God" (2005, p. 196).

Now I want to consider in greater depth Graham's imaginative use of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as the *locus* of pastoral-practical theology. I claim this because she employs his concept of *habitus* to argue a horizon of transcendence in the immanence of practice when Bourdieu's own position was of atheism and who

[3] Elaine explained that *hope and obligation* are her reworking of *politics and ethics* (a jotted note which I recall related to a conversation on 27 August 2014).

did not treat religion in a sustained way. I want to examine his position and the way in which Graham has utilised his ideas in conceiving of the improvisation of *habitus*.

Bourdieu's (1992, p. 135) concept of the "objectivity of the subjective" would accept transcendence or the Divine as the objectivity of the *habitus* as a "misrecognition". Religion takes its place alongside "...the domain of art and 'culture'..." as an "...island of the sacred" which "...offers, like theology in other periods, an imaginary anthropology..." (1992, p. 134). Reed-Danahay (2005, p. 43) portrays his position on the sociology of religion as one in which the religious sociologist could not participate scientifically because of "practical interest" (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 3). Equally, she maintains that he considered his own non-religious stance to exclude him from analysing religion (cf. Hervieu-Leger, 2000, p. 13, via Wood and Altglas 2010, p. 20). This reading is not cognisant of Bourdieu's (2010, p. 2) assertion that a "scientific sociology" of religion was a "difficult venture" though not impossible for one who participated in the field of belief. There is a challenge for the religious and the non-religious researcher in doing a sociology of religion. On the one hand there are those who attempt a sociology of religion as insiders to the field who insist that belonging is necessary to understanding and on that basis they exclude external critique. Conversely the one who is an 'objective observer' (does not belong to the field) "...is likely to omit taking into account in his analysis the belief that he had to ignore in order to construct his object" or the *illusio* (the belief that is associated with belonging to the field). Rather than being dismissive of religion per se, he demands a self-reflexive scientific approach which eschews "...locking ourselves into the alternative between the partial and the impartial, between the interested and partisan insider and the neutral and objective outsider..." (2010, p. 5, italics original). He is alert to the reality that "Militant unbelief can be just an inversion of belief" (2010, p. 5). What is required of the researcher who belongs to the field of belief is for them to objectify their participation in the field. If this is achieved then there is an advantage to the researcher with a practical interest because "...belonging can become an aid to objectivation of the limits of objectivation..." (2010, p. 5). Essential to a scientific sociology of religion is the self-reflexive exposure of the commitments of the researcher (whether of belief or unbelief) and presenting those practical interests for all to see.

Graham (2002, p. 157) similarly expresses this concern in her approach to pastoral-practical theology cautioning that "Only those who pretend to talk from nowhere or everywhere are to be feared as 'playing God' and claiming the power of life and death by appealing to universal and totalizing vision and knowledge." Elsewhere she has set the agenda for transparency in public theology: "So questions of who speaks from where, who speaks for whom, and how 'experience' can be trusted and authenticated, let alone the uses to which our knowledge is put, are all essential questions of good public theology" (2009, p. 240; cf. 2013a). Graham (2009, p. 240) indicates her understanding of "good" including not only that which is "reliable and trustworthy" but importantly "ethically unimpeachable". Transparency ensures that validity is vitally concerned with ethics. Enfolded in the whole question of ethics are the values we express through our actions (cf. Coghlan, 2013). I would argue that ascertaining what is 'good' depends on adeptness in first person practice.

The implication of being explicit about commitments is that these need to be made transparent in propositional representations (e.g. academic papers, reports, theses). In this respect, Wood and Altglas (2010, p. 23) note that Bourdieu "...does criticise scholars for deleting from their writing the way in which the research was carried out, like painters who make sure that brush strokes cannot be seen in their completed work - as he writes, 'Homo academicus relishes the finished'." This bolsters my argument for researchers to write themselves onto the page.

As much as Bourdieu allows for the researcher with a religious interest in the field to engage in sociology, it can only be insofar as it is scientifically rigorous, making objective the subjective and being clear about the limitations of that activity. Embedded in his method is the assumption that belief is a misrecognition within the *habitus*. Thus, for Graham to frame the task of PT in terms of a *habitus* of faith, she breaks with Bourdieu's assumptions about what informs a scientific sociology of religion by adopting a horizon of transcendence in the immanent. "The exact nature and purpose of ultimate reality may be cloaked in mystery; but at least a purposive and practising community meets to celebrate and realize the Divine possibility" (2002, p. 209). And perhaps, to some extent, by referring to the Divine as possibility Graham is conceding that Bourdieu may be right and that the objectivity of the subjective *habitus* of the Divine could be a misrecognition. However, she is embedded within the *habitus* of faith and therefore holds out the possibility of the Divine being disclosed through the practising communities of faith. It is through

those practices that there emerge the values of hope and obligation characterised by uncertainty and provisionality.

Graham makes it clear that she would want to improvise in a different direction from a *habitus* of Christian community which focuses on the paradise of Eden prior to "The Fall". Instead she embraces the impulse of an eschatology which is "...in human and divine actions fusing in the realization of redemption, justice and disclosure" (2002, p. 209). This trajectory is "a dynamic" which "...may not just characterize Christian communities, but the whole of human history" (2002, p. 209).

It strikes me that this is the point at which her use of Bourdieu in pastoral-practical theology provides an explicit epistemological framework for the dialogue between the disciplines. First, here is a necessary faithfulness to the disclosures from within *praxis*. The challenge of dialogue between PT and action researchers is to engage authentically with the *habitus* of the spiritualities they draw upon. In the dialogue with action researchers and wider social science discourse practical theologians will have to confront the common assumption "...among sociologists to confine the relevance of religion to the past" (Reader, 1994, p. 135 critiquing Giddens).

Second, what will be the challenge of AR (and social sciences) to PT? It could be an invitation for the discipline to resist its colonising tendencies and instead of perpetuating narratives of God that foreclose on possibilities for transformation, to opt for telling the stories of disclosure in which God is on the margins. This is something of what is being expressed in Bourdieu's challenge to those attempting a sociology of religion. Researchers are to be rigorous in scientific reflexivity, questioning their relation of participation to the field of belief.

So what are we to make of Graham's offer of a *habitus* of faith? Undoubtedly, her proposal of communities of practice which are disclosive of transcendence and the imperatives of hope and obligation is a vision expressed in highly theoretical language. It could be considered somewhat ironic that in setting out the epistemological foundations necessary for "*a turn to practice*" she articulates it in a decidedly abstract way (2002, p. 96, italics original). Woodward *et al.* (2000, p. 105) argue that this leaves practical questions unanswered such as how is it possible for the "classic Christian theological tradition" to take its place alongside her more progressive, unconventional expressions of the faith. Furthermore, she is not explicit about how to go about the task of indentifying the theologies disclosed

through communities of practice. Her proposal of 'transforming practice' distinctly evades explicit grounding in the particular practices of communities. Furthermore, Graham's (2013b) critique of Cameron *et al.* in their failure to declare their "positionality" and being "off the page" is one that could be made of much of her own writing.

This is not the whole story. The esoteric, impenetrable flavour of some of her writing is complemented by other contributions in which she is less hidden and her theology is disclosed in practice. An example is *Words Made Flesh* (Graham, 2009), a collection of her writings over a twenty year period. Her participation in a particular historical context and her unfolding development as a feminist practical theologian is evident. She is aware of the concerns that are raised about inductive approaches to theology: "They worry that theologies that begin with human experience struggle to progress beyond that perspective, and that practical theology is nothing but autobiography, phenomenology or anthropology" (2009, p. x). What is distinctive about contextual, practical theology is the transformation of "the mundane into something remarkable" "because it dares to place any claims about human values, actions or culture against the ultimate horizon of that which we call God" (2009, pp. x, xvi). In the introduction she is 'on the page', charting her interests and developments. In many of the papers she demonstrates what a 'turn to practice' looks like and how out of her own *habitus* of faith (e.g. as a feminist practical theologian, Anglican, academic) she engages in discerning such disclosures in day to day reality (e.g. body, cities, media etc...). Her embeddedness in the practices she seeks to understand and transform is striking in that her attention to her own story and the stories of others within the historical context is rigorously scrutinised in terms of the wider academic discourse.

Graham's conceptualisation of God and her commitment to a post-modernist perspective may prove alienating to those who hold a more traditional understanding of faith. Her vision for PT is radical with its rejection of universalising truth and insistence on truth that is provisional, attending to the silences, the margins, and the Other. Yet her insistence on a *habitus* of faith that is embedded in situated practice means that her vision emerges out of "...a model of Christian practice which inherits and inhabits traditions of practical wisdom that are realized and re-enacted through the purposeful ordering of the community" (2002, p. 208). So although her vision of pastoral-practical *praxis* is deeply challenging to more traditional expressions of the

Christian faith, her critique comes from within the community, the *habitus* she seeks to re-imagine and re-articulate. Graham (2002, p. 199) offers an intellectually rigorous articulation of practice that encompasses both doing and thinking and demonstrates active commitment to studying the disclosive practices of faith communities within the wider social network.

I argue that Graham's lifework in 'transforming practice' offers a way of negotiating the boundaries between faith communities and other social contexts. Key to dialogue is self-reflexivity situated within the *habitus* of faith, aware of roots and clear about vantage points whilst always maintaining an open stance to fresh insights, particularly as we remain attentive to the Other. In Graham's (2009, pp. 331-333) sermon on pilgrimage she adjures pilgrims to be steeped in the scriptures and in the communion of saints whilst at the same time forging "its own way" in company. This faith journey is life affirming and prophetic, lived "in the public squares, the streets and the market places" in which we meet and are met by a diverse multitude, an admixture of those who are familiar and strange.

There is a caveat. Though Graham's vision includes traditional expressions of faith it is hard to see how foundationalist expressions of faith are to be accommodated in any kind of dialogue as her vision for PT seems to exclude such notions of transcendence. Furthermore, is not her insistence that the possibility of the Divine is known through the partial, contingent, and provisional practices of communities a form of 'big story'? Indeed Reader (1993) identifies this danger in Graham and Walton's (1991, p. 3) critique of Newbigin's 'Gospel and Culture' programme. He claims that all three authors are agreed that the Grand Narrative of the Enlightenment project has failed though for contrasting reasons. Newbigin was certain that the individualistic secularism of Modernity required re-evangelisation. The Enlightenment had cut off Western culture from its Christian roots. Graham and Walton reject the idea that there ever was a universal narrative of Enlightenment and are keen to point out that its ideals were originated by and served the narrow interests of bourgeois males. In their assessment, Newbigin's vision of a Christocentricly renewed culture is a hegemonic "...nostalgia for a time in which truth was more coherent, public and immanent than now..." (1991, p. 5). They opt for an approach that embraces fragmentation, the partial, listening to the silences, and being attentive to the margins or the Other (1991, p. 6). Reader describes Newbigin's approach as a Traditional Grand Narrative and indicates that Graham and Walton offer a Post-

Modern Grand Narrative. He asserts that both are based on an "uncritical rejection" of the Enlightenment (1993, p. 61).

Reader (1993, p. 60) posits a "both-and" approach which he calls Modernity-Post-Modernity which he has developed into the concept of blurred encounters. He rejects a Grand-Narrative in favour of proposing that we all participate in traditions which act for us as metanarratives. Post-Modernity invites us to inhabit our traditions with self-critical awareness open to the Other. This is achieved through "a willingness to let go...in order to listen..." and requires us "...to create spaces within which we are able to conduct our discussions safely" (1993, p. 62). Those within the Christian tradition have the challenge of fully inhabiting our own narrative whilst being attentive to the narratives of the Other. "We must accept our differences without abandoning our own beliefs" (1994, p. 18). He is convinced that the Christian tradition itself is rich with sources for being enriched by the Other.

In developing his idea of 'blurred encounters' Reader draws on two distinct approaches: the communicative reason of Habermas and the deconstructionism of Derrida. He treats them as counterpoints. Habermas holds out the possibility of rationality, arguing that the project of Enlightenment will come to fruition through communicative action when dialogue is sustained to the point of achieving the ideal speech situation. Derrida (in Reader, 2005, p. 25) emphasises hospitality towards the "'other'". The significance of this is that faith could be considered as other to reason. Reader identifies a trajectory of hope both in Habermas' rendering of the possibility of reason and in Derrida's construal of "...a messianic expectation that agreement may be achieved and must be the ultimate objective" of communication (2005, p. 42).

Drawing upon both thinkers, Reader contends that faith (Derrida) and reason (Habermas) are brought into a creative tension which, according to his analysis, are not identical but share some common ground (2005, p. 40). He identifies four "locations for encounter". First, remaining committed to the messianic trajectory of hope; second, holding together the universal and the particular; third, a commitment to human subjectivity as openness or hospitality towards the Other; finally, envisioning a democratic impulse towards which we strive given "...its inherent indeterminacy and uncertainty" (Reader, 2005, pp. 40-47). Christians are engaged in "...a dialogic journey from 'encounter' to 'purposive threshold', the liminal space

that can be revelatory of new insight" (Reader and Baker, 2009, p. 220 in Cameron, et al., 2012, p. 11).

I bring together Graham's idea of wisdom being discerned and cultivated within the *habitus* of faith with the liminality of Reader's 'blurred encounter' in order to throw light on the nature and manner of negotiating the boundary upon which Coghlan is 'perched'. It involves a thorough going awareness of how we are authentically embedded in our *habitus* and remain open to the Other. For the action researcher who is a practising Christian it is necessary to be fully embedded in both the AR orientation and the faith community. Conversely the person of faith and the formal practical theologian engaging with the AR orientation has to inhabit both spheres of practice intentionally.

How is it possible to inhabit the *habitus* of our faith tradition and that of AR and the wider sociological discipline without conflating, confusing and compromising? The problem is more acute for people of faith. Those belonging to a more orthodox stream of the Christian tradition may insist on a theological discourse of universal truth. Equally, those who embrace the post-modern situation with its insistence on plurality, diversity and rejection of foundationalist narratives may find it difficult to accommodate the traditional renderings of faith (cf. Graham, 2013a). Reader (1994, p. 95) proposes that the challenge of post-modernism for Christian communities means that "...the standpoints that we adopt are tentative, fallible, and provisional. We live and move in the space between doubt and conviction." This does not mean descending into a pluralistic quagmire in which we no longer retain our sense of identity. This open stance does not mean that we have to lose ourselves in the process of dialogue but rather find

> ...a better way of being together. We can become engaged in the world in a different way: less aggressive, less determined to make others like ourselves, less dependent on external roles or material success, and take ourselves less seriously. This will not be because nothing matters or is really important to us, but because they matter in a different way (1994, p. 95).

This demands the cultivation of skills of reflexivity, "...a dialectic between detachment and engagement, between objective or communicative rationality and a passionate involvement" (1994, p. 96). It appears to me that negotiating the boundaries between the disciplines and the practices of Christian faith communities involves living paradoxically. It demands a self-aware embeddedness within our *habitus* of faith or tradition with a receptive and critical openness to the other.

Living with these tensions is encapsulated in the observation of Rabbi Eugene Levy (in Kritzinger, 2001, p. 1) that

> As you bring up your children, you want them to have roots and wings. You want them to feel grounded and secure, to feel connected with things that count. But you also want them to think new thoughts and feel new feelings, to be able to fly in new directions.

Kritzinger (2001, p. 2) proposes that the Church engage in mission in the 21st century by refusing to become "wingless fanatics or rootless liberals."

CONCLUSION

So what of ART? If we take this 'roots and wings' analogy further, imagine the musician, painter, sculptor, and creative writer. Artists are born into a creative *habitus* and as such learn the accepted rules and skills that already exist as they come into their particular community of practice. It is only as they become fluent in their 'tradition' and are 'rooted' that they are able to take risks and do the unthinkable, 'taking wing' and effecting improvisations, some of which represent a decisive break with received knowledge.

I have considered sources available for thinking about AR and PT. I began by giving attention to what I meant by 'doing theology' and then consider those who have made an explicit link between AR and PT. Coghlan's fluent movement between both worlds led me to search for philosophical sources enabling me to think about how we negotiate the boundaries between the disciplines. Graham's *habitus* of faith and Readers' blurred encounters are suggestive of a dialogue in which conversation partners are rooted in their traditions and ready to fly in the encounter with the Other. What is apparent to me is that "schooling people in the well-springs of tradition from which practical wisdom flows" (Graham, 2013b, p. 178) requires the virtues of hospitality and humility.

ART counters the dominance of theology in the dialogue with AR. It challenges us to be deeply rooted in our traditions with a profound openness to the Other. The Christian theology of God as the creator of all things invites me to imagine that sources for divine revelation are located in human practice whether overtly theological or within 'non-theological' sources. This confidence is enriched by the Christian understanding of God entwined in human existence through the incarnation of Jesus, context-bound in 1st century Jewish Palestine. The incarnation

offers a universal vision of humanity insofar as that which we have in common is the particularity of our cultural experiences and practices (cf. G. Adams, 2010, p. 177). In my use of the word practice, I intend the idea of *habitus* encompassing all actions and thoughts, skilled living and philosophical thinking, mistakes and lessons learned and so on. The vision I hold out in this thesis is the Christian understanding of God as creator and incarnate in Jesus which frees us to full and open engagement with divine revelation in human experience whatever its source. Wisdom is the virtuous practice of discerning this revelation.

So let me take stock of the territory explored so far. In the first chapter I showed the emergent nature of my research and pointed out the messiness of being caught between positivist convictions and the objective-subjective epistemology of AR. I introduced a motley family of diverse approaches to AR yet bound together by the conviction that knowledge is generated in action through democratic relationships between researchers and participants. In this chapter I placed colours on the pallet for the practice of ART by examining what I mean by 'doing theology' and explored the current conversations in the literature between AR and PT. The blurry boundaries of Chapter 1 were echoed in Coghlan's image of being perched on the boundaries between AR and his religious life. Reader too evoked the nature of this dialectic with 'blurred encounters' which is the liminality between PT and non-theological discourses. Negotiating these boundaries is an activity of wisdom which takes place in Graham's *habitus* of faith in dialogue with the Other, discerning the impulse to improvisation. In the next chapter I demonstrate a way that I/we opened communicative space through establishing Word Café and critique the extent and limits of our actions.

CHAPTER 3

WORD CAFÉ: OPENING COMMUNICATIVE SPACE?

The spoken word converts individual knowledge into mutual knowledge, and there is no way back once you've gone over that cliff (Fowler, 2014, p. 126).

INTRODUCTION

I'm going to begin at the beginning and tell the story of Word Café as the method we used to explore ART. I do not want to create the impression that this is a linear story in which I began with a methodology underpinned with a complete survey of the literature prior to commencing my research project. Action inquiry was the orientation I chose to inhabit as a way of being an actor in the world. My engagement with the literature enabled me to gain some perspective on the journey I was about to take. However it was in the 'doing' that there was a drilling down into my practice as literature interrogated my practice and invited me into further readings. Reason (2006, p. 197) deftly captures the emergent nature of this approach to inquiry asserting:

> Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process, as individuals learn skills of inquiry, as communities of inquiry develop, as understanding of the issues deepens, and as practice grows and shifts changes over time. Emergence means that the questions may change, the relationships may change, the purposes may change, and what is important may change. This means action research cannot be programmatic and cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods.

Word Café grew out of my own developing inquiry into my practice which offered a pragmatic approach that was flexible and open to the evolution of a community of inquiry.

In the spirit of emergence, I begin by describing the method I used to create a conversational arena in which I could explore what was happening for the congregation in particular events of my preaching practice. The method was consonant with my espoused AR orientation. I had encountered Habermas' communicative action/space via Kemmis (2006) prior to Word Café. However, it was not until I had completed the Word Café cycles that I became aware of Wicks and Reason's (2009) explication of opening communicative space based on Kemmis' treatment of Habermas. It was as if glimmers of insight latent in the experience of Word Café were being uncovered and refracted through the lens of communicative action/space. In other words, this theory of action had crossed my consciousness and

undoubtedly influenced my research with others and now it was in the foreground becoming explicit in my thinking on what I had done.

My starting point is to set the context for Word Café by tracing its nascent origins. First, I articulate the burning question and outline some of the conceptual ideas that shaped a pilot project. Second, I give a broad overview of Word Café. Third, I set out the philosophical approach and salient features of the World Café community out of which Word Café arose. Fourth, I give a detailed account of the way in which Word Café worked and will highlight some of the methodological issues that became apparent in the process. In a critical conversation with Wicks and Reason's fleshing out of the practicalities and paradoxes of opening communicative space, I critically examine the extent to which Word Café was the creation of such a sphere. This sets the stage for examining specific themes that arose in the move towards deepening dialogue in the rest of the thesis.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

How was I going to investigate the quality of communication in my preaching of a sermon? Two conceptual ideas, one drawn from PT and the other from AR, shaped my approach to the research question. I encountered a holistic approach to PT in giving consideration not only to orthodoxy (right beliefs) and orthopraxy (right actions) but also to orthopathy (right affections) (Cartledge, 2004). During this same period I became acquainted with AR and in particular the concept of espoused theory (what we think we are doing) and theory-in-use (what we are actually doing) (Argyris, 1993; Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Dick & Dalmau, 2000). These ideas provided a framework for exploring potential gaps between what I/we think we are doing and what we are actually doing in my preaching of a sermon in terms of belief, practice, and affections.

I conducted a pilot study in 2006 with Cumnock Congregational Church (1998-2008) using an AR approach. I explored the practice and theory of AR. Crucially, I identified areas where my methods did not resonate with my AR orientation. When I was called to Witney Congregational Church (2009-present) it was with the understanding that I would be pursuing collaborative research with them.

I developed my research methodology with my congregation through co-planning meetings in which we explored preaching and AR. Out of this process I

identified World Café (J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005), which embodies the philosophical view that human beings have the capacity to share wisdom and transform their own lives and that this wisdom sharing occurs 'naturally' over a cup of coffee. It is an intentional method designed to facilitate quality listening and cross pollination of ideas. I adapted this process and named it Word Café as an expression of the theological idea that the sermon is the preaching of the word of God and that there is a strong New Testament association of sharing food with proclaiming good news.

The co-research was conducted through ten Word Café events following worship services. The data consisted of video recordings of the services, table cloths which recorded participant's discussions, and my process journal. The table cloths were transcribed and thematised. I brought together these themes and my own reflections and wrote a critical analysis which I made available to the congregation in hard copy and on secure websites. Participants were invited to respond to my analysis. A crucial part of our shared learning was to identify specific new actions arising from the action-reflection and to test them in the ensuing cycle.

SOURCE OF INSPIRATION: WORLD CAFÉ

The adaption of the World Café process as the method for opening communicative space to explore my practice of preaching the Bible grew out of grappling with choices and being explicit about these in my process. These centred on the human and financial resources that were available to me. Initially I had envisaged dialogue groups and their conversations being recorded and transcribed as had been done with the co-planning groups. I realised that without funding for a research assistant to produce reliable transcripts, the enormity of the task was beyond my capacity. This limitation forced me to ask questions about how the research could be captured as data.

Poland (1995) explores what a transcript represents as part of a rigorous research process. He fleshes out the challenges of representing spoken words in written text and teases out the way in which "transcription is an interpretive activity" (1995, p. 306). I encountered Poland's paper in July 2010 as I was in the process of shaping the research design on the basis of the transcribed co-planning meeting data. He stimulated me to ask myself why I had assumed that the best research data was a verbatim transcript of speech and therefore a more 'objective' form of data. Poland highlights the way in which a transcript represents an interpretation of what had been

spoken. For example, it is not always clear when a person is making a statement or asking a question. This in no way negates the value of transcribing interviews or conversations but flagged up the way in which any attempt to turn speech into text is a hermeneutical act.

What was becoming apparent was that data generation involving social contexts inevitably has limitations. The choice of method had to fit availability of resources and serve the wider methodological purposes of the research. Essential to the whole process was practicing a hermeneutic of suspicion. It was important for me to be explicit about my choices and be critical of why I made these choices.

Running alongside questions about transcripts was the challenge of how to best stimulate discussions that would be natural, meaningful and actionable. My impression of the co-planning groups was that they were constrained by the recording process. For example, everyone had to be seated in a semi-circle to be included in the frame of the video camera. It concerned me that there may be a dampening effect in that some participants may have been less vocal because they were being recorded. My emerging understanding that AR was a way of living in a spirit of inquiry was pushing me to interrogate my reasoning for favouring transcription as a method of recording data. I was becoming aware that despite my espousal of an AR orientation my motivation for recording and transcribing dialogue groups was being driven by a positivist agenda. My motivation was to create incontrovertible data that would be a platform upon which I could ensure the quality of the research process and be confident about the validity of my insights into the data. This growing awareness of the mismatch between my method and orientation (methodology) enabled me to make choices formed out of a greater consistency between my values and practice.

The centrality of explicit choice making in AR is emphasised by Reason (2006). He ordinarily steers clear of prescriptive language and rather surprisingly states that "...the primary rule in approaching quality is to be aware of the choices that are made and their consequences" (2006, p. 187). My instinctive concern was with ensuring that my research process was without error. This was challenged by the alternative perspective of AR on the nature of what makes good research. Reason is adamant that "Quality rests not so much on getting it right but on stimulating open discussion...of seeing choices, seeing through the choices..." (2006, p. 199). He poses the questions we need to interrogate in first, second, and third

person choice making: "What are the choices we are making, and are they the best choices? Can we be transparent about these choices in our reporting of our work?" (2006, p. 199) The guiding principles of awareness and transparency are identified as markers of quality research.

The awareness of my positivistic motivation prompted me to choose a method that resonated with the orientation of AR. Accepting that the quality of AR is located in a nexus of critical conversations, then the choices about method had to be scrutinised in terms of an epistemological decision in which knowledge generation is collaborative. Reason and McArdle (2004, p. 115, itlacs original) capture the ethos of AR being "...conducted *by, with* and *for* people, rather than research *on* people." In contrast with the distant, objective researcher, this cooperative approach to inquiry insists that the researcher is involved with others in a critical-subjective relationship.

The practice of preaching is itself communication. Inherent in the idea of communication is that there is speaking and listening in turn and a growing understanding between people. Yet preaching appeared to me to be a monologue and I could not detect how I was able to listen to the congregation, except in esoteric terms. The AR orientation of collaborative inquiry insistently posed a challenge to me. If I wanted to gain insight into my practice of preaching the Bible as communication with my congregation, then it was imperative that I find a way of data generation that was closer to the natural human activity of conversation. The method of exploring the practice had to echo my espoused values of co-research. How could I/we create a space that would foster speech and equally encourage a deeper kind of listening?

No research method is without its limitations. What is crucial is that the method chosen serves the AR orientation as fully as possible. Equally important is the explicit recognition of the limits of the method as an approach to inquiry. Ison (2008) offers a useful discussion distinguishing between method and methodologies in terms of systems thinking and practice. He compares a method to a recipe that has to be followed step by step whereas, "...a methodology involves the conscious braiding of theory and practice in a given context" (2008, p. 155). The former is systematic and pays attention to the parts to make up the whole where as the latter is systemic, viewing the whole to understand the relations of all the parts. Methodology is to do with interconnections and being able to see the whole system. A person

learns to cook in a systematic way by following the recipe which leads to the development of skills and a growing understanding of how ingredients work together and complement one another. The cook becomes adaptive. It is possible to experiment with different ingredients and to try a pinch of this and a dash of that when the apprenticeship of following the recipe has been served.

In this way I had to learn about the World Café as recipe, systematically putting it into practice. This being acknowledged it is important to recognise that the choice of this method was methodologically motivated by action inquiry. I learned the method by serving an apprenticeship with an experienced practitioner, David Adams. Through a combination of elements - reading, planning the Word Café and watching him conduct the process - I gained a level of practical understanding that enabled me to act into the moment. Through this systematic process I was able to adapt Word Café in order to realise increasing methodological wholeness.

I turn now to outline the main features of World Café (J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005, pp. 14-15). It arose out of an experience that proved to be serendipitous in forming a practical response to a rainy day in California. They stumbled upon the power of conversation around tables and over coffee as way of wisdom sharing and knowledge building. They locate their approach in the branch of the AR family of Appreciative Inquiry (2005, p. 7), spearheaded by Cooperrider. At the heart of World Café is the assertion that the process "...reintroduces us to a world we have forgotten. This is a world where people naturally congregate because we want to be together. A world where we enjoy the age-old process of good conversation, where we're not afraid to talk about the things that matter most to us" (2005, p. viii). At the core of the conversation is an underlying confidence that everyone in the room has wisdom to bring to the table and that together this can be shared and new possibilities for the future envisioned.

World Café, though inspired by the ordinary spontaneous conversations that arise around tables over a cup of coffee, is an intentionally designed process. It is not a universally appropriate method and there are specific issues that need to be considered when deciding whether to embark on the World Café process.

First, the World Café host has to possess certain qualities, pre-eminently that of being in the moment. A trainer in the art of hosting, Toke Moller (quoted in J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 159), is emphatic, "you cannot host a Café or any deep learning space without being fully present yourself. It's about real life practice, not

theory." The host is one who works through fear and negotiates the facilitation of World Café from a calm centre so that s/he "can see what you need to do in the present moment" (2005, p. 159). Attention or mindfulness is a key theme in the AR orientation (cf. Ramsey, 2014). Moller's assertion that the World Café is about "real-life practice" not "theory" perpetuates an easily misunderstood and potentially damaging dichotomy between action and reflection. This apparent marginalisation of theory is balanced by the assertion that the host has to understand the "multiple systems" "...of knowledge-sharing, the system of working with the question, the system of relationships" which implies theoretical knowledge based on previous experience (J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 160). Action inquiry resists the notion of applied theory insisting that our real life practice is the impetus for generating ideas which then feed new practices. In Chapter 5, I give fuller consideration to Ramsey's (2014) "scholarship of practice centred on attention". For now, it is enough to say that her approach privileges practice without marginalising theorisation. Attention is held within a nexus of practices, ideas and context. I would argue that Moller's emphasis on "being fully present" in a "real-life practice" does not require subjugating theory. The insistence that practice requires understanding of the systems indicates that theorisation does have an important role. Following Ramsey's (2014) scholarship of practice, I would propose that the host is 'in the moment' and through the practice of the Café attends to the ideas generated within a particular context(s).

Given the host has the quality of calm attention in the moment s/he will have to weigh up whether World Café is an appropriate approach for the specific context (J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005, pp. 162-163). A Café is viable when there are more than twelve participants and a minimum of an hour and a half available for the conversations. For the process to work well there has to be a commitment to share ideas, to be innovative, and build community. It creates space for "in-depth exploration of key challenges and opportunities" (2005, pp. 162-163). It is appropriate both for first time meetings between people and easing them into "authentic conversation" and for existing networks of people in which the aim is to deepen relationships. The Café enables a dialogue between a speaker and an audience. This is particularly pertinent to my own research inquiry into my preaching practice as communication.

There are several conditions that preclude the use of World Café. First, it does not suit a context in which there is a predetermined outcome in which the answer to the question or the solution to the problem has been settled upon. Second, it is not suitable in contexts in which the intent is to give a single direction or to impart information. Third, the Café is not a setting for working out detailed "implementation plans and assignments" (2005, pp. 162-163). Finally, if you have polarised positions and there are raised tensions between people it may not be the best approach, though it is possible for a skilled host with awareness and careful planning to manage a productive conversation given these challenges.

Once the decision is taken to host a World Café, there are seven interlinking aspects to its design. These are intended to harness the creative potential of conversation. The Café is underpinned by certain presuppositions. It is assumed that "The knowledge and wisdom we need are already present and accessible" and that "Intelligence emerges as the system connects to itself in creative ways" (2005, p. 167). Emergent insight arises as participants actively engage in valuing each contribution, making connections between ideas, "listening into the middle", and attending to "deeper patterns and questions" (2005, pp. 162-163).

There is a Café etiquette that fosters this process. It is essential that every participant contributes by bringing their ideas and experiences to the table. Listening is directed at understanding what the other person is saying. As the conversation unfolds there is a connection of ideas. There is a collective listening which searches for the deeper patterns and questions that interrogate and push the boundaries of knowledge and insight (2005, pp. 162-163).

Brown and Isaacs (2005, p. 174) visually portray World Café as a circular puzzle with each of the principles interlocking. The crucial first step is to set the context in which the purpose, participants and boundaries are determined for the dialogue. They offer a metaphor for this essential framing of the World Café: "I often like to imagine context as the banks of a river that help channel the flow of meaning without controlling it" (2005, p. 49). This image gestures towards a process that maximises conversations and nurtures emergent themes and outcomes.

Once a clear purpose has come into focus, Brown and Isaacs encourage hosts to name their Café to reflect that purpose. They cite examples such as Leadership Café, Knowledge Café, Community Café etc... (2005, p. 163) With the purpose established the host identifies potential participants and how to ensure a breadth that

will maximise "insights and discoveries" (2005, p. 163). The host has to consider the parameters of the Café in terms of "time, money, venue and so on" (2005, p. 163).

With the first design principle of setting the context in place six other interlocking pieces of the Café follow. The second principle is to create a hospitable space in which there is an ambience of "psychological safety that nurtures personal comfort and safety" (2005, p. 174). This is conceived of both in terms of the physical layout and the warmth and welcome of the host.

The third aspect of the design centres on the art of forming questions. The questions to be explored have to "matter". Brown and Isaacs (2005, p. 174) determine that the "questions that matter" are "powerful" and will capture the collective attention of participants and draw them into "collaborative engagement". A key issue of power centres on the host determining the question that "matters". How does the host conclude that the questions are "powerful" and will foster "collaborative engagement"?

The Café process invests significant responsibility in the host to form questions in consultation with colleagues. The criterion for constituting a powerful question is its generative potential. Brown refers to Peavey's (1994) image of "short lever" and "long lever" questions. The former is a closed question which elicits a 'yes' or 'no' response whereas the latter is open. A powerful question then is one that does not have an answer and encourages dialogue and invites further and deeper questioning. The Appreciative Inquiry approach means that the underlying assumption is that powerful questions have a positive *telos* rather that a problem orientation. It could be argued that this pre-supposition of the positive question may in itself close down the scope of an inquiry where there may be problem orientated questions to be formed.

The fourth feature of the Café is stimulating the contribution of every person. This involves fostering a sense of connectedness between people, "the 'me' and the 'we'" (2005, p. 174) . Each person has something to give and to receive.

The next design principle involves the host facilitating a process of cross-pollination of ideas and the connecting of this diversity. There are various ways of enabling participants to interact around the room carrying ideas and generating new ones. The thrust of the conversations is to honour the full range of perspectives and through this to notice emergent patterns and attend to the wholeness of what is "in the middle" (2005, p. 174).

The sixth aspect of the Café is an intentional corporate listening to the "patterns, insights and deeper questions" (2005, p. 174). The key to this stage of the process is to discern the common themes without expunging the individual contribution of participants. This is the stage when the attention participants afford to one another shapes the discussion towards the whole.

The final piece is put into place as the host facilitates the sharing of the group knowledge. There are varied approaches to this including the display of table cloths on the wall or post-it notes onto walls and larger sheets of paper with themes visibly shared with the group. Whatever approach is used for displaying this "collective knowledge" it is essential for it to be visual and actionable (2005, p. 174).

As I have noted already, consideration of World Café as a method to facilitate the conversation centring on my preaching practice began because I was confronted with limited resources. This practical problem nudged me to reflect more deeply upon my methodological assumptions. World Café lent itself to my inquiry because the process is intended for adaption in different contexts. Furthermore, it assumes a clear purpose, a set of common questions, and fostered a relational environment that engendered listening conversations. Importantly it was a method that allowed me to participate in the dialogue without dominating it.

THE STORY OF WORD CAFÉ

Having already given a broad overview of the Word Café I construct an account of what we did. As indicated earlier, the development of Word Café as a way of inquiring into my preaching practice grew out of a sustained collaborative process. Throughout the process my intention was not to contrive a neutral vantage point and pose as the dispassionate observer. As Ladkin (2004, p. 538) emphasises, the AR orientation "...acknowledges that all observation is biased, all situations are 'framed', and that a large part of the research process itself is the unpicking, and unearthing of those frames through which the researcher or co-researchers view the situation." So it was that my choice of method arose out of my methodological commitment to being involved both as the researcher and the researched with others researching with me.

Word Café events occurred between November 2010 and July 2011. Ten Sundays were identified for the Word Café inquiry and the intention was for these to take place according to my usual practice and that of the congregation. First, we

identified a mixture of ordinary and special Sundays (e.g. Christmas, Palm Sunday, Pentecost) which would be followed by Word Café. Second, I prepared for worship and the preaching of the sermon according to my ordinary routine. By 'ordinary routine' I am explicitly stating that I did not re-utilise a previous service plan and sermon that I felt went particularly well. My aim was to attend to the preparation and delivery of the sermon within the context of worship according to normal practice. So in preparing a fresh sermon I intended to critique that which might be considered to be less than ideal. At the same time the process of Word Café was an intervention which inevitably changed the situation. I was preparing in the routine manner all the while aware that something quite outside of the routine was going to happen. Third, I did not proactively seek out a higher attendance or recruit people who would not normally be in the service. If there were raised attendances or visitors on Word Café Sundays it was a natural occurrence. Finally, participation was open to all who were part of the worship on a Word Café Sunday (including visitors). Participants in the Word Café sessions after the services were self-selecting. I encouraged everyone to take part and made every effort to include people of all ages and abilities. Children were excluded in view of the ethical implications and our resources to ensure safe participation.

It is important at this juncture to make explicit the ethical considerations which shaped the decision to exclude the children. The risks involved in Word Café were deemed too high in terms of the psychological impact of being involved in disclosive conversations with potentially sensitive themes (death, pain, suffering, sexuality etc...). Liamputtong (2007) identifies children as among vulnerable populations with which to conduct research. Not only are children vulnerable as a group but the Word Café research itself had the potential to deal with sensitive issues. Liamputtong (2007, p. 5) quotes the perspective of Wellings *et al.* (2000, p. 256) who consider that "Research is deemed as sensitive... 'if it requires disclosure of behaviours or attitudes which would normally be kept private and personal, which might result in offence or lead to social censure or disapproval, and/or which might cause the respondent discomfort to express'." The decision not to involve children in this research process was to avoid intrusion into areas of their lives that required sensitivity. Liamputtong (2007, p. 6) draws attention to the work of Rensetti and Lee (1993, p. 6) in which they identify a number of factors that would qualify

research as being sensitive, one of which is particularly pertinent: "Research that deals with sacred things."

I qualify what I mean by declaring that it was my intention to hold the Word Café on Sundays in a way that would represent the ordinary practice of preaching within worship. What is meant by 'ordinary' and why was it so important that the Word Cafés happened on 'ordinary' Sundays and that the process itself was 'ordinary'? Astley (2002, pp. 47-49) examines the nature of "ordinariness" honing in on that which is usual or normal. The "usual" refers to that which is habitual or commonplace practice. "Normal" refers both to what usually happens and that which ought to happen. The word ordinary has a negative connotation: "Ordinary life is something we want to escape from or rise above. We often lust after something 'extra' in our lives and for someone who is 'extraordinary'" (2002, p. 49). He argues that the ordinary is far too readily devalued. He is not suggesting that all that is ordinary should be indiscriminately regarded as of equal value. Identifying "wisdom, understanding, knowledge, skill and excellence" and "morality, faith, hope and love" he claims that these are commonly "...found in those who may seem on other grounds - particularly intellectual, academic grounds - to be undeveloped, uneducated and ordinary" (2002, p. 49). I am using the word 'ordinary' to denote that which normally happened with the people with which it habitually occured. The intention was to attend to the wisdom latent within ordinary people participating in the event of preaching within worship and to have conversations in an ordinary or natural way.

Despite the aim of Word Café being framed within ordinary practice, it was an aspiration that could not be fully realised. Word Café constituted a set of interventions which meant that the context of my preaching practice was inevitably extraordinary. First, the very fact of co-planning meetings and the shaping of the Word Café preaching events raised my/our awareness and in some way, however small, changed things and therefore made our actions not normal. Second, that my practice was going to be scrutinised by me and the congregation meant that these Word Cafés could not be ordinary. Finally, the introduction of video equipment was novel to the Word Café Sundays and inevitably intruded into a familiar space. I know that I was conscious of being filmed and it introduced an element of unease for me. In terms of acting ethically, the congregation were made aware that the services would be video recorded and no one objected. It is noteworthy that the impact of the

video recording was not raised as an issue by participants or non-participant members of the congregation.

There were two purposes for introducing the 'out of the ordinary' presence of the video camera. First it created an opportunity to watch my practice. This 'observer' vantage point allowed me to check it against my 'inner' vantage point and formed part of the framing and re-framing of my practice. Second, the video footage allowed those who were unable to be present on Word Café Sundays to watch the filming of the service and respond to it.

A key aspect of forming Word Café was that it was to be inclusive and voluntary. All members, regular attendees and visitors were invited to participate in the Word Café process following the worship service. As part of an ethical approach to the practice of inquiry approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Chester, those who chose to participate received information sheets and consent forms to be read, signed and dated. Vulnerable adults were assisted by their carer to read, explain, and to sign and date the consent form in order to ensure an informed choice was being made in taking part in the research. All participants were made aware of the importance of the consent forms as part of creating a safe environment for the well being of all. Handing out the forms and seeking their return was, like the video camera, an intrusive, out of the ordinary element. It was made clear that participants could opt out at any time.

All who chose to participate gathered in the church lounge, arranged in such a way as to create a café atmosphere. There was a power point slide with a steaming coffee cup with the key question appearing in the centre surrounded by further prompting questions [see Table 1]. The tables were arranged in the room so that there was a clear line of vision towards the projection screen. Each table seated four people and was covered with two square sheets of white catering paper cloths. The top paper cloth was placed diagonally so as to lend to the impression of a café with fabric cloths. Four different coloured pens were placed on the table for the purpose of writing, drawing and doodling. Four paper coasters were placed at every setting. A card with the questions was placed in the centre of each table.

A long table was prepared with sandwiches, crisps, fruit, water, tea and coffee. Participants were encouraged to serve themselves and to move to a table. Once people were seated and had begun eating, I raised my hand. Participants raised their hands in response and the room fell silent.

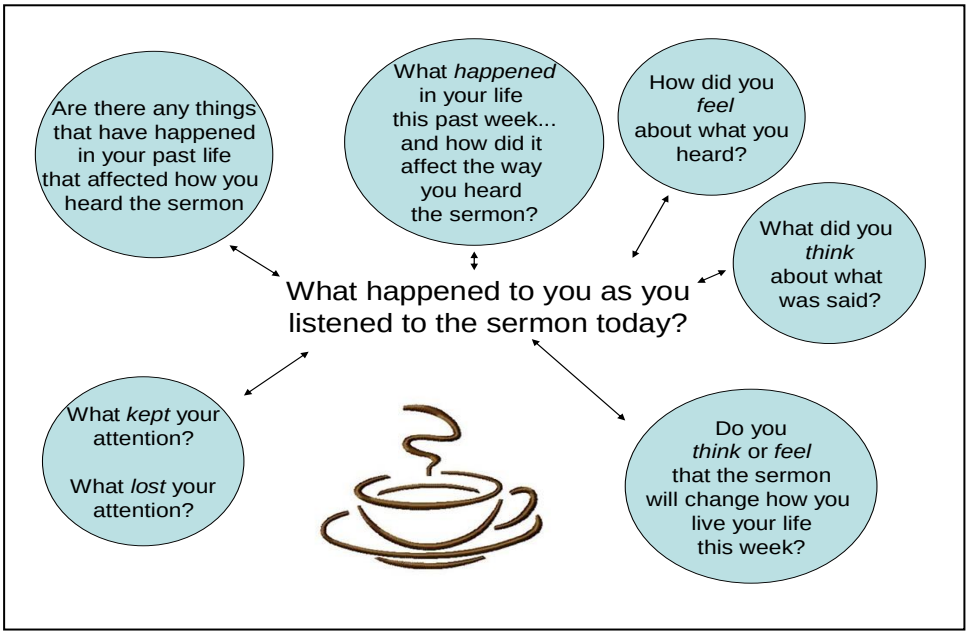

Table 1

I offered a welcome to Word Café and explained the process. This introduction was abbreviated as Word Café bedded down and people began to become familiar and own it for themselves. Word Café consisted of three rounds of conversation of approximately twenty minutes with a 10-15 minute plenary session. After the first round each table self-appointed a host who remained for rounds two and three to introduce the discussion to the new group which formed during successive rounds. My role was to facilitate the Word Café but not to become directly involved in any of the conversations. My view was that in leading worship and preaching I had already had my say and my non-participation at the tables was a conscious choice to create space for participants to express themselves, to speak and to listen.

I intentionally did not get involved in the three rounds of conversation. This non-involvement was interrogated by participants and, after considerable discussion there was a consensus that my non-participation in the Word Café conversations was appropriate (PJ, 29.03.2011). I defined my role as facilitator ensuring that there was a good mix of people around each table. I monitored the conversational buzz. If I noticed a conversation that was not taking off, had stalled, or had one person dominating, I intervened. The intervention was not for the purpose of entering into the conversation and imposing my viewpoint. Rather, my intention was to stimulate

the dialogue and to encourage quality listening. Part of my role was to remind people to record their conversations through drawing and writing.

The final stage of the Word Café was a plenary session. A table cloth was put up on the wall and a participant volunteered to record the themes that were being discussed. The aim of this session was for participants to identify important strands in their conversations and to share them with the whole group. Importantly I had the opportunity to ask or answer questions and to make explicit my own feelings and thoughts about the sermon within worship.

Following the Word Café event, I randomly numbered and dated the table cloths and then transcribed them into an A4 document. In an A3 format I represented the tables according to themes suggested by the questions. In this way I could easily see what had been discussed by topic. I could identify certain tables had conversations that focused on particular areas more than others (cf. E. T. Stringer, 2007, pp. 95-123).

A key part of the re-framing process through the Word Café was the keeping of a process journal. I set myself the task of writing as soon as possible after the Word Café Sunday. The first stage of this writing process was to record my critical responses to my sermon preparation and delivery within the wider context of worship. Concomitant with this was a consideration of the Word Café process, of how I managed facilitation and of my own emotional and cognitive responses to the conversations. The second stage of writing followed viewing the video recording of the worship service. I watched the services in their entirety to get a sense of how the sermon related to the rest of worship. I felt it was important to pay attention to my practice not only as a preacher but as a worship leader. Following this intentional process of viewing I critically reflected on my own response to what I had seen, heard, and experienced.

The transcripts, thematisation, and process journal were brought into conversation with each other in an extended reflection on Word Café. These became richer and thicker in analysis through the Word Café cycles. I made the transcripts, thematisations, and reflection papers available in hard copy, on a secure area of the church website and a Facebook group page. Participants were invited to read and respond either by writing on the documents or by speaking to me directly. I know that a couple of participants took an active interest in reading these. Apart from minor editorial corrections, there was no written feedback on the Reflections.

The conversations were not limited to the Word Café sessions. There were many conversations with participants that occurred at other times and as far as possible I recorded these in my journal. Word Café was a way of opening dialogue about the sermon and the whole of worship in other various settings (e.g. the church kitchen, coffee mornings).

As I worked with the Word Café process a number of limitations became apparent. First, it was clear that though there was a high level of participation of members of the congregation in Word Café, there were those who chose not to enter the dialogical space. Whilst I was succeeding in communicating with a certain section of the congregation I was aware that there were still a significant number of voices that I would not hear. The lingering question is how to nurture conversation with those who decline to enter into any kind of participatory process?

Second, though many participants keenly recorded their ideas and thoughts on the table cloth, there were those who were reluctant to put pen to paper. What happened to the conversations that were not represented on the table cloths?

Though I was aware of this issue it was not until the Word Café on the 22 May 2011 that clear evidence emerged to show the inadvertent occlusion of the voices of some participants. The passage of scripture that formed the basis of the sermon entitled *Authentic Voice* was John 10:1-10. On the basis of conversations that I had with farmers who raised livestock, I made the assertion that they do not give a name to the animals that are going to be slaughtered. The reason I gave was that endowing a name is a crucial aspect of forming a relationship. The shepherd calls his sheep by name and they respond to his voice and in this there is a signal of the relationship that exists between them.

One participant offered an experience that countered my claim. It took place during a Word Café but was a moment in the kitchen when coffee and tea supplies were being replenished. This person related that s/he had named their farm animals even though they were going to slaughter. This was important because in this person's view each animal "had its own wee personality" (PJ, 31.05.2011). S/he called each animal up into the van that was going to take them to slaughter and described the emotional trauma experienced on each occasion. This participant's experience was not recorded on the table cloths and was not raised during the plenary dialogue. If I had not had this unplanned conversation in the kitchen I would never have known of this person's experience.

My awareness of the limits of Word Café led me to a heightened attention to those who may not be sharing their stories and writing them down. I encouraged participants in subsequent Word Café events to share their stories. I took it a stage further and offered to be available listen to people in a one to one situation if they were not comfortable sharing in the Word Café groupings.

Third, the focus question accompanied by further generative questions had the potential to restrict the extent to which Word Café was a communicative space in which new questions and concerns might emerge. This was apparent when participants expressed the anxiety that their conversations sometimes had nothing to do with preaching, perhaps focussing on some other aspect of the worship. Throughout the process I encouraged them to focus on the main question without restricting conversations that may seem to stray from 'preaching' or the 'sermon'. It is significant that a new generative question arose during the cycles of Word Café.

Fourth, a key challenge in being the host of Word Café was that of my positioning as an insider-outsider in the inquiry process. A critical question was how it is possible to negotiate being both the researcher and the one researched with my congregation who are also researching and being researched? How could I be both deeply embedded in the practice and yet have enough distance to be able to make quality judgements about what was happening?

Collins (2002) grapples with his insider-outsider relationship with the Quaker Meeting of which he was a member and employee and which he was researching. He contends that the whole idea of insider-outsider is a metaphor that has come to define our understanding of the nature of reality itself (2002, p. 80). Collins challenges this metaphor arguing that "We all experience multiple belongings, each of which may be used to gain a purchase on understanding others. The insider/outsider dichotomy (or spectrum) can be expressed in terms of similarity and difference. Our relations with others are always marked by a certain playfulness involving the marking of first one and then the other" (2002, p. 81). The whole question of being an insider-outsider in my inquiry is called into question because the very notion is essentialist. "It implies a unified and unitary self which is largely unchanging and metaphorizes society in a very simplistic way, rather as a series of buildings, each with a single door which serves as both entrance and exit: either one is in or one is out, and if one is in one building, one cannot at the same time be in another" (2002, p. 91). He proposes that the insider-outsider dichotomy is an

unhelpful compartmentalisation of the 'self'. The self is "...a dynamic multiplex self which is dialogic, negotiated in and through social interaction, and therefore dialectically related to society" (2002). Self is storied into being as my stories encounter the stories of the other and becomes 'our' narrative(s). The multiplicity of voices comprising the 'self' means that the insider-outsider distinction is redundant because we are both concurrently. Nonetheless, the insider-outsider concern pervades the social science literature and, in his view, continues to demand our attention (2002, p. 92).

The insider-outsider remains an important consideration in terms of the wider discourse but the 'metaphor' that fuels it requires challenge. The difficulty of a clear cut demarcation between insider-outsider invites a conception of a holistic approach of being present in the moment. Instead of a rigid compartmentalisation of the insider-outsider positionality, I contend that it is more fruitful to attend to who I am in relation with others in-the-moment. The challenge of facilitating Word Café was of cultivating attentional practices in which I was aware of my positionality.

EXTENT AND LIMIT OF WORD CAFÉ AS COMMUNICATIVE SPACE

I return to the principle driver behind my inquiry: to explore the extent to which my own preaching practice was communication. How could I know that my practice of an essentially one directional form of speech was being heard and understood? How could I evidence that I was listening to my hearers? In other words how was my practice of preaching the Bible demonstrably communication? What began to emerge through my own action and reflection into my practice was that it was about more than 'communication' as an exchange of words or attentive listening. Rather, it was focused on the quality of the relationship that existed between me and my hearers. Together we created relational space for dialogue reflecting upon action and planning into further action. With the congregation we created a dialogical space for inquiry into my practice through Word Café.

In this section I explore Habermas' (1981b, 1984) concept of 'communicative space' as interpreted and employed by Kemmis (2006) in critical AR. The concept of opening communicative space is suggestive of what we were setting out to do in the Word Café. Drawing upon Wicks and Reason (2009), I outline the main features of communicative space and scrutinise the degree to which Word Café opened up such an arena.

Theoretical and practical elements of opening communicative space

Wicks and Reason (2009) flesh out what is involved in setting the context for communicative space beginning with an overview of Habermas' theory of communicative action as interpreted by Kemmis (2006). Wicks and Reason relate that the bulk of their years engaging with the many splendored approaches to AR revealed a common thread: "...the narrative seemed often to be told in terms of the practice of inquiry: 'what we did together'" (2009, p. 244). Frequently, inadequate attention is paid to the various elements that create frameworks for these essentially relational inquiries. These early stages in developing the inquiry are crucial to "success or failure" (2009, p. 244). They identify this early part of the process as "'opening communicative space'" and ominously state that "...these first steps are fateful" (2009, p. 244).

Habermas' concept of communicative action is articulated by Kemmis (2006, 2008) in terms of critical action research. He identifies three strands of educational AR: technical (particular interventions in order to solve problems), practical (problem solving combined with changing governing values), and critical (problem solving, practitioner self awareness and social critique with a liberative *telos*) (2006, p. 95). It is the latter strand that Kemmis and his colleagues developed as they drew on Habermas for their critical/emancipatory approach. For him

> The first step in action research turns out to be central: *the formation of a communicative space* which is embodied in networks of actual persons... A communicative space is constituted as issues or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants experience their interaction as fostering the democratic expression of divergent views...permit[ing] people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do, in the knowledge that the legitimacy of any conclusions and decisions reached by participants will be proportional to the degree of authentic engagement of those concerned (2006, pp. 103-104, italics original).

The formation of communicative space necessarily arises out of communicative action. Kemmis (2006, p. 97) suggests that "...the aspirations of communicative action could be written into or alongside the practices of reflection and discussion characteristic of action research." He found in Habermas a robust response to the postmodern critique of "the ideal of a form of reason" and that his theory of communicative action was sufficient to undergird a critical/emancipatory AR approach (2006, p. 96). Habermas offers intellectual rigour which, far from marginalising practice, integrates action-reflection.

The bedrock of communicative action is four validity claims posed as questions. These assist in shaping communicative competency amongst participants by enabling them to reflect on the quality of their 'utterances'. These are: do conversation partners comprehend each other? Are contributions to the conversation true in the sense of being correct? Are participants speaking sincerely? Is speech characterised by what is "morally right and appropriate"? (2006, p. 96, 2008, p. 127; 2005, pp. 575-577; 2009, p. 245) These questions are grappled with by the participants and together they make judgements about what they consider to be comprehensible, true, sincere, and morally right utterances. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 577) understand Habermas' validity claims are "...not an ideal against which actual communications and utterances are to be judged..." but are qualities that "...we normally take for granted about utterances...".

For Habermas there are two mutually related publics: public discourse and public spheres. The former encapsulates communicative action and the latter communicative space (Kemmis, 2008, p. 131; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 586). Communicative action in itself is a pause in action, to reflect and move into further action (2005, p. 576). Necessary for communicative action is "*intersubjective agreement*" (2005, p. 576, italics original) in which all participants choose to enter into the dialogical relationship seeking to understand each other and come to an unforced consensus about how to act. Communicative space describes what communicative action does in opening up public spheres for discourse to take place.

The theory of communicative action postulates that social reality is to be construed in terms of "systems" and "lifeworlds". Systems refers to social structures such as organisations and institutions including economic, political, and legal drivers. Systems are directed towards functional purposes which are focussed on a success orientated goal (Kemmis, 2006, pp. 99-100). Lifeworlds describes the lived out inhabited world in a nexus of relationships shaped by value commitments. Habermas regards the lifeworld, "...to be understood as a *court of appeal* in which validity claims can be tested through argument or conversation" (2008, p. 129, italics original).[4] Truth and justice are the fruit of communicative action and crucially this relational process does not require recourse to a transcendent being (2008, p. 129). When communicative action occurs it opens communicative space which in turn

[4] Kemmis appears to claim the phrase *court of appeal* though Habermas uses it in ***The Theory of Communicative Action*** (1984, p. 17).

fosters the development of the lifeworlds of the participants which Habermas dubs an "'ideal speech situation'" (Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 245). "For Habermas, the ideal speech situation may be sufficiently approximated, 'if only the argumentation could be conducted openly enough, and continued long enough'" (2009, p. 245). The ideal speech situation is an intentional action in which subjective individuals are brought into a relation of intersubjectivity. Habermas asserts that the lifeworld is shaped by "the *logos* of language" and is the basis of intersubjectivity (Kemmis, 2008, p. 128, italics original). The subjective individual joins this linguistically structured life which has preceded them (2008, pp. 128-129). Truth arises out of the intersubjective communication sustained through to the point of unforced agreement. Truth is located in "...the substance of the arguments as they unfold" (2008, p. 129). Kemmis contends that this ideal speech situation will never be fully realised. There will never be "...*complete* agreement, *complete* understanding, *complete* consensus about what to do. Frail and fallible though it may be, all we have, and all we will ever have, is the conversation" (2008, p. 129, italics original). Communicative action fosters the development of lifeworlds which in turn shape the systems.

Habermas identifies a crisis in the relationship between systems and lifeworlds, principally that there is an 'uncoupling' in which lifeworlds have been colonised by the systems. The systems have taken on a life of their own and appear to be autonomous and those people who live within the systems are swept along by what appear to be irresistible economic and political imperatives (Kemmis, 2006, p. 100). Communicative action and the opening of communicative spaces create opportunities for dialogue which "...*explore and address the interconnections and tensions between system and lifeworld aspects of a setting as they are lived out in practice*" (2006, p. 101, italics original).

Habermas is not without critics. Therefore, Kemmis' (in Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 246) interaction with his concepts in developing critical action research means that his own approach comes under similar scrutiny. Habermas (2006, p. 16) is at pains to critique "scientism" and postmodernism in favour of a modernist project following through the trajectory of enlightenment to its fulfilment. "I think that instead of giving up modernity and its project as a lost cause, we should learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programs which have tried to negate modernity" (Habermas, 1981a, pp. 11-12). In order for modernity to achieve its *telos* it is essential for integration between modern culture and "everyday praxis" which

draws upon "vital heritages" (1981a, p. 13). It is this revitalised lifeworld that will help to form the values for the economic and political institutions of a fulfilled modernity. Those who hold to a traditional science perspective dismiss his project as a form of idealism whereas postmodernists accuse him of perpetuating the totalising tendency of modernism.

A key issue concerns the empirical evidence for the social categories that Habermas postulates. The idea of communicative action with the concept of the public sphere, the ideal speech situation, the existence of system and lifeworld and so on make sense in a self-referential way within the system of thought (the very criticism levelled at postmodernists). Critics question whether these constructs are verifiable, especially when the actualisation of an ideal speech situation is only theoretically possible. In a stinging critique, Steinhoff (2009, p. 1) concludes, "Those alleged conceptual explications and analyses of ordinary language with which Habermas intends to clarify the meaning of 'rational' and set the course for a distinction between purposive rationality and communicative rationality neither explicate nor analyse, as we have seen; instead they merely posit things that cannot withstand scrutiny." Turner (2014, p. xi) declares his preference for a social science theory "...where abstract laws and models...explain how the social universe operates...." It is not surprising that he is dismissive of Habermas' communicative rationality which he contends is "...more philosophical than sociological..." (Turner, 2001, p. 8). His judgement of critical theory in more general terms is that theory "...becomes a license to say just about anything one wants about the social world, apparently without the requirement to check these pronouncements against data" (2001, p. 9). These arguments caution us against a wholesale, uncritical acceptance of Habermas' theorisation. Scott (2012, p. 180) agrees that "...there remains an epistemological gap..." that arise out of Habermas' idealism and which requires him to take greater account of the real world. However, if we are aware of the limitations that exist within his philosophical construction, I consider that his ideas offer an important insight into historical and social reality and our experiences of the external world. So though Habermas and Kemmis' use of him is not without difficulty, it appears to me to be a valuable framework for understanding social reality and in my particular context, a community bound together by theological practices.

In addition to the limitations of the theory of communicative action is the way in which Kemmis' interpretation and development of Habermas poses significant

challenges to a theological approach to AR. Kemmis is explicit in making unnecessary an appeal to a transcendent being or God to the realisation of truth and justice in communicative space. Significantly, Habermas' (2006) own religious atheism explicitly insists on the place of religion in the dialogue with political and scientific concepts which themselves have a heritage in religion.

Now, whilst it is important to avoid conflating the 'logos of language' with Christian theological concepts, there are exciting possibilities. The 'logos of language' and the idea that all we have is the conversation, evokes the Johannine use of logos made flesh, a key idea in Christian theology. Instead of viewing truth as fixed in an unchanging, transcendent God, there is an invitation to explore revelation itself as a form of 'communicative action'. With reference to the practice of preaching, Lischer's (1996) focus on the language of preaching offers a potential dialogue with Habermas' logos of language. Lischer insists that preaching is not about the mechanics of grammar and the breadth of vocabulary. "A child does not decide how to talk. We do not choose a language for preaching any more than we choose a language for everyday speech. Before we speak a language, our language speaks us" (1996, p. 170). He then becomes entangled in a contradiction by asserting that the task of the preacher is to conform to that language. The question arises that if we have no choice about the language we have learnt then why do we need to choose to conform to it? Nonetheless his acknowledgement that language speaks us resonates with Habermas and in an intriguing way offers potential for theological reflection on the Word made flesh both in the life of the ecclesial community and her/his practice of preaching the word. Is the incarnation a kind of 'opening of communicative space' and Christian community a *habitus* within which this kind of discourse takes place? My contention is that though critical AR potentially cuts out 'theology' as a dialogue partner at the same time it holds out potential as a catalyst for theological development.

Noting that Habermas' theorisation is perceived as "highly intellectualized" and "ponderous", Wicks and Reason (2009, pp. 246-247) flesh out the practical contours of opening communicative space. Drawing attention to the categories of first, second, and third person practice, they acknowledge that an argument could be made for opening communicative space in first person practice. However, their principle concern is not with such an internal dialogue but the external activity of

opening communicative space in second and third person practice. They give special attention to the second person practice context which corresponds to Word Café.

Wicks and Reason (2009) identify two main approaches to establishing second person inquiry. The first is a formal process: to initiate an inquiry with a group of people to research a particular area of practice. The second is a serendipitous inquiry that arises "...'in the sheer flowing ubiquity of the communicative dance in which we are all engaged'" (2009 citing Shaw, 2002, p. 10). These two approaches may interpenetrate in that a formal inquiry may arise out of ordinary dialogue and the formal inquiry group may become more conversational engendering dialogue in the informal spaces. Whichever the starting point for the inquiry, they emphasise that it is important to give attention to Schutz's (1958, 1994) "interpersonal needs" of inclusion, control and intimacy. Wicks and Reason are clear that if the AR inquiry is programmatic then systems will dominate over the shared lifeworld of participants. By contrast, an emergent approach that is centred on validity claims and continues in a spirit of mutual commitment to the dialogue will foster groups that move through to intimacy. They locate communicative space "...as being that delicate place where the lifeworld meets the system, a liminal, in-between space where two opposing qualities meet" (2009, p. 258). They employ an evocative image of wetlands, a geographical terrain in which sea water and fresh meet and mix (2009, p. 258). Opening communicative space is essential to the creation of a relationship between systems and lifeworlds in which the lifeworld animates the system.

Wicks and Reason (2009) pose a set of questions to each aspect of interpersonal needs. Inclusion concerns the quality of an individual's belonging to the group revolving around these questions: "*Who am I to be in the group? Will I belong? And will the group meet my personal and practical needs*?" Control negotiates the relations of power within a group asking "*Who has power and who is powerless? Can I join with others to gain power and influence to meet my needs?*" Intimacy is the phase when individuals operate effectively together in relation to the group and are able to act together. Intimacy considers, "*Who are we together in this group space? How do our needs and abilities complement each other? How effective are we?*" (2009, p. 248, italics original) Inclusion and control involve emotional, task and organisational issues which, if negotiated well, allow participants in the communicative space to realise a safe arena in which each is empowered to

express their interdependence. This leads into the mutuality of intimacy which holds together the various dimensions of the group.

The consequence of communicative space existing liminally between systems and lifeworlds involves a set of paradoxes. Wicks and Reason identify a non-exhaustive set of tensions that the action researcher has to manage in opening communicative space (2009, pp. 258-259). First, it is important to contract with a clear purpose for the group whilst leaving the contract open to re-negotiation and change. Second, clear boundaries need to be set to create a safe sphere for communication whilst recognising that these may need to be redrawn in order to avoid isolation from the context. Third, full participation is crucial to the space and yet there has to be recognition of the multiplicity of views about what it is and how it is to be exercised. "...This vision [of participation] can become a tyranny if not held lightly and flexibly" (2009, p. 258). Fourth, leadership requires the wisdom to know when to exercise and relinquish power in the facilitation of full participation through to autonomy. Fifth, emotional anxiety is concomitant in group inquiry and has to be controlled and find appropriate expression. Sixth, there is a tension between chaos and order. The communicative space is disruptive in that the dialogue honours difference and at the same time invites participants towards unforced consensus. Finally, the *telos* of the dialogical sphere is both liberatory and practical. The former aims at conscientization in which people become aware of oppression. The latter is principally concerned with what to do now in response to a particular challenge or problem. The wetlands of communicative space have no clear cut territory and yet it is in holding all of these tensions together that we will sustain the conversation between systems and lifeworlds.

Word Café as communicative space: a critique

Now that I have delineated some of the theoretical and practical issues, I interrogate the nature of what we did in Word Café, including the preparation stages. There is no doubt that a lot of conversation occurred between participants. The critical question is to what extent - if at all - the Word Café opened communicative space?

I begin my analysis with the insights of a participant in the Word Café process. This person was involved for the first time and following the session spoke to me directly. This person told me that they were not "very good at small talk" and

"felt that the Word Café was conversation with a purpose." This person said that they "had spoken with more people in the church today about meaningful things than [they] had ever done in [their] whole time as part of the church..." (PJ, 8.03.2011). In their view Word Café was a conversation with a purpose about meaningful things. At least for this person it would appear that there was some measure of opening a communicative space, or at least the beginnings of such a process.

Following Wicks and Reason's phases of inclusion, control and intimacy, I examine aspects of the experiential data to test the extent to which communicative space was created. I explore the emotional, task, and organisational aspects of negotiating the first two phases of meeting interpersonal needs in the move towards intimacy. I do not intend to follow these concepts in a strictly linear fashion but to notice these phases through particular experiences as they occurred in the unfolding of the research process.

Inclusion

The co-planning sessions were a critical part of the inclusion phase. It was in these group meetings that emotional elements surfaced. Wicks and Reason (2009) maintain that the questions "Who will I be in this group? Will I belong?" expresses concerns about freedom to participate fully in a context of mutual challenge. They highlight that the highest risk at this stage is to those who "...bring experiences of being disempowered" (2009, p. 249). This was particularly evident in the comments of one participant.

During the co-planning sessions a participant expressed anxiety about whether they had anything valuable to contribute (PPPM, 26.05.2010, group 1). The co-planning sessions explored biblical passages that have 'doing' as a concern and related them to AR. We were having a look at James 1:22-25 and in the discussion this person declared, "Well now I'm confused." I asked what s/he was confused about and the reply came, "Everything. I'm sorry. I am. I'm scared to say anything, because I don't know what to say at the moment, really." Another participant encouraged this person to, "Take a sentence at a time." More discussion followed and then this participant revealed, "I don't think I am very clever and I'm a bit of a dimwit sometimes. I don't know what to say but when I get to know you I do know what to say." This person's comments indicated a level of low self esteem. The ability to belong to the research group was being inhibited by the messages this

person carried with them from other experiences. This person's self-definition had created a malaise of self doubt about intelligence and inhibited their ability to feel emotionally secure to make what might be considered a 'valuable' contribution. There is a hint however, that this person felt confident to express their views once they were familiar with and developed trust in another person.

This participant's explicit articulation of disempowerment during the co-planning process alerted me to the possibility that there were likely others feeling apprehensive about their involvement. An additional form of disempowerment was to be found in those people in the congregation who have special needs. Through the co-planning process it became clear to me that I had to find an approach to the dialogue that would be empowering. Word Café with its informality in small group conversation combined with the opportunity to express ideas not only in writing but in drawing and doodling created increased opportunities through inclusive activities. Crucially, all of this was in an hospitable, comfortable space conducive to conversation. Yet as Wicks and Reason (2009, p. 250) note "...it is surprising how often meetings of all kinds are conducted in places that are physically uncomfortable and culturally strange, where people cannot see and hear each other." The World Café principle of creating a welcoming, homely atmosphere is key to engendering quality conversations.

The careful, prolonged steps taken towards the development of Word Café were an essential part of ensuring inclusive inquiry. Wicks and Reason (2009, p. 250) write of the importance of preparing for the communicative space through "...inclusion oriented activities..." which "...can take several weeks or even months. Rushing too quickly into establishing an inquiry group is nearly always a mistake." The preparation spanned eight months from the initial Church Meeting to the first session of Word Café. This allowed time and space for conversations about the conversations that would be taking place. It was the period in which the context could be carefully understood and the confidence of potential participants could grow.

The question then arises as to whether Word Café managed to create an inclusive communicative space. Because of the anonymity of the Word Café data I was unable to follow the participant who expressed anxiety about both the ability and quality of their contribution to see if their own sense of confidence had increased. However, a collective comment written on a tablecloth on 6 March 2011 shows

evidence of a small number of participants whose initial reluctance to join the dialogue was transformed into willing participation. "A couple of us had said after their first experience of 'Word Café' they would not come and yet they are still coming & have learned to enjoy it. They thought their views did not matters [sic] but they now know they are understood & contribute." The emotional issues of belonging as well as the task issues of being understood and of making an important contribution were being met.

There is further evidence that Word Café managed inclusion of those who might be described as being socially marginalised. At 3 July 2011 Word Café one of the participants expressed how their experience had changed over the months. I recorded (PJ, 4.07.2011):

> N____ who was very reluctant to get involved in Word Café ended up as host of a table. S/he was so excited. I observed his/her introducing the conversation to his/her new dialogue partners. S/he told me afterwards that his/her first Word Café involved doing a drawing and a sentence. This time s/he had written loads. This is a particular example of a voice being empowered to speak and of someone gaining confidence to lead.

Word Café had achieved inclusion for this person on emotional and task levels. It had been a process of belonging, contributing and leading.

Considering the increased involvement of these participants I wrote, "Word Café has been a space for people to grow in speaking out and listening. I observe the way in which people own the process. This ownership of the conversation space has involved 'owning' the Bible. The conversations have been a way of listening to the preaching of the Bible and responding to that spoken word" (R, 3.07.2011). Inclusion occurred for these participants and so opened up the possibility of communicative space.

However, it is important to pay attention to those who did not have their need for inclusion met in Word Café. One person came to the Word Café and left abruptly and without explanation. Other participants expressed that sometimes Word Café worked for them and at other times did not, depending on how they had entered into the space (R, 24.07.2011). Still others found Word Café difficult to participate in for practical reasons and for some in particular because of hearing impairment. Word Café was a process that opened up the communicative space for some and for others did not succeed. In this I recognise the limit of the method and the imperative to explore varied ways of constituting dialogical space. For example,

there was little that could be done in the Word Café setting for those with hearing impairment. The noise levels that necessarily arise in this kind of social context could not be dampened without changing the conversational environment. A different kind of conversational space would have to be created for the hearing impaired to experience full inclusion. A possible alternative would have been participation in a conversation that was isolated from competing noise. However, we did not have the physical space to create this kind of conversational environment without have a negative impact on the 'buzz' of the Word Café.

Control

This dimension of group development negotiates the power relations between conversation partners. "Who has power and who is powerless? Can I join with others to gain power and influence to meet my needs?" The experiences of participants whom I have already mentioned are indicative of issues of control. Doubts about being'clever' enough and wondering whether their contribution 'mattered' as well as moving into a leadership role were movements towards a greater exercise of power. The participants were included in a manner that gave them an awareness of their ability to influence the direction of the conversations.

A key element of this phase is being able to create a context in which differences are expressed, heard, and challenged in a way that does not disempower participants. Integral to the World Café model is expressing the diversity in the conversation whilst noticing convergences. It is about cross pollination of ideas to ascertain the wisdom that is in the middle of the room. Wicks and Reason (2009, p. 251) express the emotional vulnerability that has to be negotiated. "It remains important to maintain sufficient safety for differences to be expressed strongly without group members feeling frightened that things may fall apart completely." Adopting the Habermasian concern with system and lifeworld, they suggest that participants in the communicative space will experience difference with regard to the dominance of one over the other. In terms of Word Café, the differences did not arise in connection with such tensions. The nature of the inquiry was focused on issues that could be more clearly related to lifeworld, particularly understanding the theological significance of the experience of preaching.

One of the task issues that arose early on concerned the focus of the inquiry. In some of the co-planning group discussions there was a debate over whether the

research was solely concerned with the preached sermon (PPPM, 26.05.2010, group 3, pp. 19-20) or whether we were looking at the sermon within the wider context of worship (PPPM, 9.06.2010, group 2, pp. 8-9). There seemed to be a general consensus in the co-planning groups that the focus was on preaching within the context of the whole of worship. After the third Word Café, I paraphrase a concern expressed by a participant that "...something needed to be done to keep people more tightly focussed..." and "...that people should stick tightly to the subject of the sermon..." (PJ, 9.02.2011).

It is worth noting that Word Café continued beyond July 2011 at the behest of participants. The view that discussions ought to be directed to a single concern continued to be expressed by some:

> ...Power over Word Café and the process has shifted away from me to the participants. Participants felt a need for the questions to change and though they did not agree unanimously about how the questions ought to develop (some wanting me to prepare directive questions whilst others wanted to continue with the open questions with a change of focus from the sermon to worship). Significantly, the dialogue took place and I played my part in the conversation and expressed my own view that I did not want to become prescriptive and ask closed questions. The two participants who wanted 'specific' questions were concerned that the table conversations went off on tangents. I responded with an assurance that even the 'tangents' were important to the discussion of what happened in the worship experience (PJ, 29.02.2012).

These continuing cycles of action reflection demonstrate Word Café had been owned by participants. The shift of power away from me eventuated in moving me towards fuller co-participation. Differences of opinion were being held by the group and I was able to express my own perspective that I did not perceive tangents as a threat. The salient point is that the AR cycles that continued beyond the initial set of Word Café events witnessed a reconfiguration of power relations and an increasing sense of control by participants in the communicative space.

The co-planning groups grappled with how participants would engage with the sermon in worship. There were those who wanted questions that would give a clear focus for their listening experience. Others maintained that this would limit the scope of engagement (PPPM, 23.06.2010, group 2, pp. 9-10). My own perspective was strongly represented in favour of open questions which would stimulate dialogue rather than close it down. My preference for open discussion was challenged by the clearly expressed desire of co-planning participants for some structured questions in

the research process. This eventuated in the Word Café key question with the suggestive sub questions. Participants in Word Café exercised control early on by adding what they considered to be an important sub question: "Are there things that have happened to you in your past life that affected the way you heard the sermon?" (R, 19.12.2010, pp. 1-2)

During the fifth Word Café the function of the generative questions was queried as one participant felt that addressing the same questions in each round led to unnecessary repetition. This was countered by another participant who felt that whatever repetition occurred was being communicated to a different set of people. This person was expressing the principle of cross-pollination (PJ, 30.03.2011).

During Word Café sessions a number of differences surfaced. Some of these tensions were limited to a particular Word Café cycle whilst others developed and spanned the cycles. One meta-conflict emerged over the practice of silence in worship, particularly following the sermon (Chapter 7, p. 208). For now, it is sufficient to note that there were dominant voices early on in the Word Café cycles which placed enormous value on the practice of silence in worship. My own predisposition to the practice of silence as part of my spiritual disciplines quite possibly made me more open to hearing these contributions. My attention to the dialogue as I transcribed the table cloths alerted me to a voice (or set of voices) that expressed that silence was not 'golden'. This indicates that within the communicative space some voices may be more readily heard if the facilitator exercises the power of their own perspective on the group (even unintentionally). Self-reflexivity enables the researcher to become aware of the absent or muted voice, specifically those that express views that do not readily resonate with them. These voices being heard will allow for communicative space to be more fully realised. This relates closely to Wicks and Reason's (2009, p. 258) paradox of exercising and relinquishing power.

The Word Café that took place on the 3 July 2011 generated considerable tension. There were two areas of notable contention. First, I chose to read my sermon *Do you believe in love?* which was focused on Genesis 24 and the marriage of Isaac to Rebekah. Strongly divergent views were expressed over the reading of the sermon and whether it had been experienced positively or negatively. Looking at the balance of the comments it would appear that there was considerable resistance to the reading approach and that it had not been satisfactory from my point of view

either. "Whatever benefits I perceive in reading a crafted text...do not outweigh the immediacy of speaking directly to the congregation" (R, 3.07.2011, p. 9).

The second conflict centred on the subject matter itself. It was recorded, "2 [sic] people have expressed their upset at sitting through another sermon seemingly on married love. One person felt strongly enough to leave part way through the word cafe [sic]" (R, 3.07.2011, p. 8: Table 2 WS1). Three different writing styles expressed discomfort with the emphasis on marital love. There were two reasons cited. First, there were so many single people present. The implication seemed to be that this focus excluded them. They were outsiders looking in as it were. Second, 'human love' was being emphasised when in their view God's love is 'greater' (R, 3.07.2011, p. 8: Table 2 WS1). Although I confess my concern for "...those who did not experience marriage or love as a positive reality" (PJ, 12.07.2011), I had evidently alienated numbers of people in my congregation.

The withdrawal of one participant unable or unwilling to cope with the conversation centring on marriage was serious. It indicated that this person did not experience the Word Café as a communicative space in which s/he had control over their emotional well being. This person found the topic too difficult in light of their own personal experience. I was able to debrief with the participant to ensure that their exit from Word Café was safe, assuring them of an opportunity for further discussion with me if desired (PJ, 4 & 12.07.2011).

There is another dimension to the issues of inclusion and control that came into view from this cycle. From time to time participants did not remain for the Word Café and submitted written responses. I noticed a difference in the way I treated these contributions. "I do tend to give 'weight' to voices that I want to hear. I have to make a conscious decision to listen to all the voices...to pay attention to the drawings and the doodles" (PJ, 12.07.2011). My positioning as an involved researcher clearly involved my own subjective judgements and necessarily meant that I was seeing and hearing things from my own perspective. In particular "My lived experience of being a married person dulled my sensitivity to those who experience life as singles" (R, 3.07.2011, p. 9). The Word Café process in which I intentionally acted self-critically, enabled me to see my biases in a way that I would otherwise not have done.

Intimacy

A claim to have moved through the stages of inclusion and control to intimacy would not be sustainable. Achieving a set of relationships in which "...the lifeworld of each person and the collective can be fully articulated" (Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 253) is an ideal to be pursued. I think I have drawn upon the Word Café research as action-reflection and demonstrated the ways in which we pushed open tentative beginnings of communicative space. I have also shown the limitations of our dialogue. In response to the final cycle of Word Café, a participant noted that "It is great the [sic] people of different ages & intellect can get together & contribute at these sessions. It is proper fellowship" (R, 24.07.2011, p. 12). With Kemmis (2008, p. 129) I would suggest that conversations we had during the cycles of Word Café were "frail and fallible". Theologically, I would suggest that as a community formed by the Word made flesh our only hope is the conversation - of God revealed in a community of flesh and blood created by the Word made flesh.

CONCLUSION

I have set the context for Word Café arising out of the World Café community. Engaging with the salient features of World Café I have described the way in which Word Café came into being and how we did it together. I turned my attention to the theoretical framework for communicative action and specifically the opening of communicative space. Following Wicks and Reason's phases of needs to be met if we are to successfully open communicative space, I have scrutinised particular aspects of the Word Café experience contained in the data to show the extent to which it was a communicative space. In the chapters that follow, I continue exploring aspects of Word Café as communicative space.

CHAPTER 4
THE BIBLE TRANSFORMS THE PREACHER:
LET THOSE WITH EARS HEAR

...Faith is about doing. You are how you act, not just how you believe (Albom, 2009, p. 44).

INTRODUCTION

Woven through the fabric of ART is a narrative of discovery. It is a story of discovering action research and practical theology which coincided with my curiosity in desiring to understand what happened when I preached a sermon. This was closely followed by the experience of doing the Ignatian exercises in life according to Annotation 19 (Ignatius, 2004, p. 9). I shifted from thinking that *theology is the doctrine of what I believe about God* to knowing that *what I do is my doctrine*; that 'faith is about doing' and that what I do is what I believe. It is the narrative of my experiential learning in the community of faith that is the context for exploring the possibility of ART.

Through these varied strands of learning I nurtured skills of first person practice which in turn enabled me to be capable of opening communicative space. This interior work consisted of a dialogue between the practices of my inner and outer world. These followed the phases of inclusion, control and intimacy on an internal level. I propose that the opening of communicative space demands a type of internal communicative space: I have a sense of inner belonging (secure in my own identity), I know the extent and limits of my power to choose and influence others (agency), and I possess an inner intimacy able to host the harmonies and dissonances that come into view when I attend to my motives. Authenticity begins interiorly as I reflect on my actions and discover new ways of acting and thinking. Coghlan (2013, p. 338) touches on the complexity of maintaining this level of integrity in practice and yet stresses "...the importance of self-knowledge, and of having self-development and training in the first person practice and critical thinking in the formation of action researchers." Opening the interior communicative space involves vulnerability and produces humility as awareness of actions, thoughts and feelings increases. This produces qualities of character in the researcher that generate confidence in those participating in forming a communicative space. In this chapter I explore a particular experience which demonstrates features of the opening of the interior communicative space.

The Bible is the focus of my preaching practice and central to the Ignatian exercises. I show how a particular hearing of the Bible became a serendipitous moment inviting me into a critical exploration of 'deed' and 'word'. Significantly this biblical insight occurred as I was making preparations for the co-planning meetings and Word Café: it shaped my ART. I argue that the spiritual disciplines which formed in me during the Ignatian exercises combined with my growing AR orientation. These prepared the ground for this aural experience of the Bible and became the impetus for the preparation and preaching of a particular sermon delivered a couple of weeks before the launch of the co-planning meetings (Boyd, 2012, p. 75).

Through this encounter with the Bible I continue to flesh out the nature of what I intend by the phrase 'doing theology'. I grapple with the question of where the *locus* of theology lies with specific reference to the relationship between 'deed' and 'word'. Is God revealed from above or below, dogmatically or experientially? Or to borrow Graham's (2013b, p. 170) terminology, is the knowledge of God "propositional" or "dispositional"? I demonstrate a dialogical approach between the biblical text and other sources in AR and PT. In this way I identify the way in which a particular biblical text demonstrates a dialogue between AR and PT. It is apt then that the central role of the Bible in my preaching and in the Ignatian exercises should correspond to a fresh hearing of a familiar biblical text.

My academic and spiritual formation engendered an action-reflection approach in researching my practice of preaching the Bible. The colours on my ART pallet heightened my attention to the relationship between doing and thinking thus providing a framework through which I saw and heard the world around me. I am aware of this colouring and recognise that my raised consciousness gave me ears to hear the story of the 'Emmaus Road' in a particular way. The setting was an ecumenical service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 2010. It led me to inquire into the scripture text and this in turn yielded new insight, offering a biblical source for 'doing theology'. This experience ran concurrent with my preparations to set up a collaborative AR process.

Before turning to the critical narrative of my aural experience it is important to address the way in which I intend to treat the biblical text in 'doing theology'. First, I survey the way in which the Bible is employed in PT. Second, I am explicit about my use of the Bible in my spiritual formation, practice of preaching and as an

action researcher and practical theologian. Finally, I turn to the Lucan narrative and demonstrate my encounter with the scripture as ART.

USE OF THE BIBLE IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Ballard (2011, p. 42) explores "...the perceived gap between the use of the Bible in theological reflection and biblical studies." "Numerous cross-currents make the use of scripture in practical theology far from straight sailing" (Ballard, 2014, p. 163). His view is that a sustained approach to the use of the Bible in theological reflection is "...without reference to the underlying theoretical issues" (2011, p. 36). He argues that theological reflection in "more structured contexts" must be reasonably fluent in biblical studies in order to be "academically credible" and provide adequate depth and rigour for the community of faith (2011, p. 37). Ballard's approach regards the Bible as witness to the historical saving events through which we encounter Christ. For him "Every sermon is a midrash on the Bible" (2011, p. 41) and he establishes clear criteria for the canonicity of the Bible centred on "apostolicity", "coherence with the fundamental witness" and "liturgical use" (p. 41). He puts forward a case for serious engagement with the Bible in theological reflection in which "Scripture is not just the Bible but is the Word preached and wrestled with so that it speaks afresh. This includes an indebtedness to the whole tradition, pre-critical as well as critical" (2011, p. 44). He does not seem to be suggesting that every person engaging in theological reflection is a biblical scholar but rather that they should be possessed of a good level of biblical literacy (2011, pp. 44-45). It begs the question: how is adequate biblical literacy assessed?

Cartledge (2013, pp. 272-273) notes Ballard's (2014, pp. 170-171) proposal that PT "...engages the Bible in four ways: as resource, as focal point, as discernment, and as object of research" and shares his concern about the use of the Bible in this discipline. On the basis of a limited survey of the literature he concludes "...*that the practical theological academy, for the most part, is content to sit loose to an engagement with Scripture*" (2013, p. 281, italacs original). Cartledge (2013, p. 279) goes on to offer six typologies to describe the how academic practical theologians use the Bible: "(1) *a priori* conceptual grid, (2) proof-text, (3) strategic selection, (4) sustained engagement, (5) critical reading and (6) excluded." There are two aspects of his overview to which I wish to draw attention.

First, the implication of this analysis suggests that he favours sustained engagement. When he explicates his fourth typology he indicates that the biblical text is being treated with greater seriousness. Implicit in the assertion of sustained engagement is the suggestion that the other types do not do so. He appears to consider this approach to be desirable, revealing close alignment with this type because in the use of the scripture in this category there "...is some level of exegetical treatment of a number of texts" (2013, p. 276).

Second, whilst he acknowledges the limitations of his typology as they "...are constructed from a given perspective" he does not reveal his interpretive lens (2013, p. 281). What he does reveal is that he does not consider that academic practical theologians on the whole are willing to engage with the Bible in a sustained manner. He posits that this lack of enthusiasm may be due to practical theology being "...under the spell of social sciences" (2013, p. 281). He throws down the gauntlet to his readers "...do you see what I see?" and invites those who do to respond with feasible proposals to correct the disconnect between the Bible and PT (2013, p. 281).

Cartledge posits two reasons why practical theologians have a tenuous relationship with the scripture. First, he attributes this disjunction between scripture and PT to theological positioning. He argues that marginalisation of the Bible is more pronounced in those with liberal theological leanings than those with more conservative perspectives (2013, pp. 279-280). He points out that though scripture saturates the life and worship of ordinary Christians it does not seem to be so in academe. Second, he claims that the Bible is diminished in the discourse of PT because it gives priority to the methodologies of social science (2013, p. 280). Cartledge's (2013, p. 281) central assertion that PT sits loose to scripture appears to suggest that this is not an acceptable position. Is it as neat as he suggests? Are the variations in the use of the Bible merely to be put down to liberal/conservative theologies or of PT being skewed away from scripture under the thrall of social sciences? Is it possible that liberals and practical theologians *do* take the Bible seriously but in a different way from those who have conservative leanings?

Cartledge's typology appears to be undergirded by his own presupposition of what constitutes a meaningful engagement between the Bible and academic PT. Because he does not make this assumption explicit it is impossible to determine his starting point though, as I have already indicated, he does seem to hint at his preference for the 'sustained engagement' typology. Though he does not explain

what he means by this phrase it would seem that he places value upon exegetical treatments of the Bible in PT and appears to be "less liberal" in his "own theological presuppositions" (2013, p. 280). I would suggest that his less liberal theological starting point has shaped his reading of the literature and the resulting typology. Let me be clear: I am not quibbling with his starting point nor with his interrogation of the use of the Bible in PT. However, I am arguing that if he were explicit about his interpretive interests then it would enhance my ability to understand from whence comes his argument.

Cartledge (2013, pp. 276-277) categorises Bennett's (2002) feminist treatment of biblical texts in his fifth type "critical reading". She gives particular attention to texts of terror and identifies the challenges they pose for interpretation in current contexts. In striking contrast to Cartledge, Bennett (2013) is revealed on the page in *Using the Bible in Practical Theology*. She sketches her evangelical starting point and subsequent disturbance as her certainties came unstuck. "'God' who seemed so like a rock now felt like a floating island in a storm. The 'seasickness' was appalling" (2013, p. 12). It is striking that whilst we are left in no doubt about Bennett's presuppositions, her analysis of the different ways in which the Bible is used in PT invites an inclusive critical dialogue.

Bennett identifies two poles or traditions in approaching the Bible broadly represented by two key theologians, Schleiermacher and Barth. The former is deemed to be the father of the discipline of PT. He identified the subjective human experience as being primary in the theological task. The latter insisted on the autonomous revelation of God who makes it possible for us to perceive it. Whereas Schleiermacher had a positive regard for culture and saw it as a *locus* revealing the divine, Barth was deeply sceptical of the same, particularly in view of the way in which the Church in Germany had accommodated Nazism. For him revelation provides a much needed corrective to human distortions. The tradition represented by Schleiermacher regards the Bible in parity with non-theological sources whilst the tradition linked with Barth accords the upper hand to the Bible amongst the sources.

There are three questions Bennett regards as important in fleshing out the tensions between the traditions: Where do you start? Who do you trust? What is the relationship between theory and practice? Answering these questions reveals the emphasis placed upon the Bible/theory/theology in relation to experience/practice. She offers her own threefold typology "...into which no one fits exclusively or

exactly... This is useful as a heuristic devise but comes with a health warning that it represents 'ideal' and constructed, not real and nuanced, types" (2013, p. 43). Type 1 is "theory/theology to practice"; type 2 is "mutual dialogue between theory/theology and practice"; type 3 "practice is all we have" (2013, pp. 43-46). With specific reference to the Bible, type 1 gives it supreme authority. Type 2 maintains the authority of the Bible in tension with human experience. In type 3 the Bible as an authoritative text is viewed as one phenomenon amongst other authoritative Christian practices. These practices of the community are authoritative because they are *their* practices. These are challenged by otherness or alterity.

Bennett is motivated by a concern to acknowledge the different roots of each tradition and to recognise common concerns which might lead to fruitful dialogue and deepening understanding. A pre-step to her proposal for "rapprochement" is the need to make explicit the contrasting "theological warrants" for the two theological poles. Bennett (2013, p. 47) defines theological warrants as that which has "...to do with how God and truth are to be understood." The one pole "...sits 'under the text'..." with the confidence that God is all-powerful and that through the Bible his revelation is made known to us. The other pole has a playful relationship with the biblical text tending to view revelation as occurring through the Holy Spirit at work in the community. The biblical texts in essence arise out of the community of faith encountering God through the Spirit. "...Authority of interpretation is seen in quite democratic terms rather than as being invested in particular institutions or persons. Revelation comes not just from the biblical text, and is neither closed by it nor circumscribed by it" (2013, p. 47). These polarities are shot through with a common concern for what Bennett describes as "experience...all the way down" (2013, p. 48).

Rapprochement between these two traditions is by no means straightforward though it is possible. "Three moves may enable a critical dialogue between the two traditions and an overcoming of the polarisation" (2013, p. 49). The first move is interpretation: taking a step back from a hermeneutic of suspicion towards a critical engagement with the text out of a disposition of "...warmth, loyalty and personal commitment" (2013, p. 49). Criticality is not the sole criteria for interpretation and embraces "...other ways of knowing such as the contemplative, the performative, the imaginative and above all the participatory and collaborative" (2013, p. 49).

The second move is "comparison and analogy". She argues that "...the language and processes of comparison and analogy offer new ways of looking at

things that are focused positively rather than on suspicion" (2013, p. 49). This disarms defensiveness in dialogue partners because it affirms the best of distinct traditions and opens up the possibility of new perspectives. This does not sideline the need for exposing untruths and distortions but offers a different way of doing it.

The third move is preparedness to risk listening to other viewpoints. Bennett illustrates this risk: Marxist sources of liberation theology were challenged by an Eastern Orthodox individual who equated Marxism with martyrdom for the bishops. "Listening to what has happened to others but has not happened to us may be a first step in interpretation" (2013, p. 50).

Bennett declares her own placement "...on the map of practical theology as committed to starting with the minute particulars of experienced life" but is at pains to resist minimising "...the role of theory or of the inherited Christian tradition" (2013, p. 50). Her approach posits that just as her PT is "experience all the way down" so too it is "interpretation all the way down" (2013, p. 51). She considers this experience saturated approach to be thoroughly in tune with the biblical texts. "The engagement between experience and scripture, in context, is not alien to the biblical tradition but is the very methodology of the Bible itself" (2013, p. 20). She envisions the creation of a hospitable space in which the traditions can meet and discover "...a more fruitful and faithful way of engaging with the Bible together" (2013, p. 51).

MY USE OF THE BIBLE

The Bible has shaped my life from my earliest memories. I locate my theological roots as being conservative evangelical holding that the Bible was God's inerrant and infallible Word revealing Jesus Christ as the way of salvation. The person I am now grew out of the soil of this language and culture of faith in which the authority of the Bible held sway over human experience. This is my default position.

My understanding of what the Bible is and how to use it has evolved. My encounter with AR and PT prompted a re-envisioning of the *locus* of theology and of preaching the Bible from within experience. I had begun with considering the sermon to be an exposition of the Bible as the revealed Word of God. As my theology developed I was attracted to the neo-orthodox approach to preaching as propounded by Barth (1928, p. 123, italics original): "For being truly questioned by God and truly questioning about God, he [sic] will know God's answer and so be

able to give it to the people, who with *their* question really want *God's* answer, even when they do not realize it." My *modus operandi* was the preacher as herald (Long, 2005, pp. 19-28). I was firmly within the tradition of preaching summarised by Craddock (2001, p. 106) which "…consistently refuses to embrace any position that implies that the Word of God is contingent, modified in any way by the situation of the congregation, or that it moves in any direction other than downward." The task of the preacher was to communicate Truth to the congregation though I was equally convinced that the sermon must arrest attention and be relevant to the lives of the congregation. I (cf. Boyd, 2015 forthcoming) embraced the evangelical inductive preaching homiletic of Lewis and Lewis (1983). Concrete experience was a way of leading hearers towards the universal truth of scripture.

PT, AR and the Ignatian exercises were pivotal in my spiritual and theological formation and re-shaped my understanding of using the Bible in preaching. I strongly identify with the rabbi, affectionately known as The Reb (Albom, 2009). Over his ministry, the rabbi moved from the academic form of the seminary sermon, "…starting at point A, move to point B, provide analysis and supporting references…" to a dialogical and gripping performance (2009, pp. 35-36). The Reb's words heading this chapter chime with my view that human perception of truth is partial and subjective, that actions define words, and that words too are actions. In the preaching of the Bible I am searching after the truth of God encountering his people in communities of practice both *then* and *now*. This involves the art of hermeneutics: interpreting the texts of the Bible and the texts of my life in community. Preaching the Bible is performance and dialogue.

I have read the Bible numerous times both privately and in community, prayed through it, and studied it in an academic context. It informs my vocation as a pastor, theologian and action researcher. My approach to the Bible assumes its normativity in shaping the practices and beliefs of the community of faith. Interpreting the Bible necessarily is a corporate activity and is shaped by our experiences. Bennett (2013, p. 30) succinctly captures the symbiotic relationship of lived interpretation of individuals-in-community:

> There is no living out that is not embedded in an interpretation, and no interpretation that is not firmly rooted in life and so is conditioned by the life lived. So there is no interpretation of meaning that is not given its colours and contours by the life horizon of the persons or community making the interpretation.

I would posit that the Bible itself arises from such communal-individual encounters with God in specific contexts and in an unfolding revelation of truth, the *habitus* of faith.

Truth itself is problematic in relation to the Bible. I would suggest that the Gospel of John puts flesh on the bones and breath into the body of what I mean by the revelation of truth. The Word became flesh and so it is in the living, breathing, relating, and speaking Jesus that we see what truth is. The Bible reveals truth insofar as it is truth discerned in the lived experience of human beings as vividly shown in the life of Jesus. Bennett (2013, p. 31) is clear that the task of interpreting the Bible demands "self-involvement and self-investment". I would suggest that the incarnation itself was a self-involving, self-investing action of God and as such indicates that our own search for knowledge is essentially bound up in embodied experience.

This particular approach to the centrality of the Bible in the community of faith is important in terms of my location within the Congregational Way. This ecclesiology has eschewed creeds in favour of covenanted community centred on the authority of scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is authoritative for every individual bound together in the covenant community. Robinson's (1903, p. 1) farewell sermon to those now known as the Pilgrims typifies the attitude of Congregationalists to the Bible: "...the Lord had more truth and light yet to breake forth out of his holy Word."

My treatment of Luke 24:13-35 grows out of a deep commitment to love and know Jesus Christ combined with the heart of a pastor and skills of a biblical scholar. I demonstrate how I experienced this biblical text as transformational both in my own spiritual formation and that of the community I serve. I undertake this task based on my assumption that the interpretation of the Bible through my own experiences nourishes me within the faith community and necessitates critical questioning of the texts of scripture and of experience in the pursuit of "more truth and light". My engagement with this passage begins with a specific moment of hearing and is predicated on the disclosures I have made about my own life experience and thought. With Bennett (2013, p. 20) I consider that "Autobiography is not incidental to the interpretation of the text of the Bible or the text of life. Self-reflexiveness...is a crucial method of understanding not only the self, but all that which the self encounters."

HEARING THE BIBLE: THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

The Gospel reading was Luke 24:13-35. As I listened I was startled by these words, "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people" (Luke 24:19, NIV). Was it a moment of faint memory or an intuition that signalled to me that something was wrong with the way in which word preceded deed? Perhaps the preparations I was making to explore my practice with an AR orientation attuned my ear to the deed-word relationship. Whatever the trigger, it arrested my attention and energised an investigation. Consulting my Greek New Testament it read εργω και λογω - deed and word. I checked all the translations and paraphrases in my library including the Authorised Version and discovered that each maintained the deed and word order with two exceptions: the New International Version and the New English Bible.

There is no grammatical reason why this reversal should take place. Why then had the translators taken this decision? An immediate possibility is that the translators may have judged that word and deed sounds better in English. However, there are four other occurrences of εργω–λογω which the NIV and NEB translate in the order in which they appear in Greek (see Acts 7:22; Romans 15:18; Colossian 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:17). A possible explanation may be in that because Moses is described as being "powerful in his words and deeds" (7:22) and is close to the description of Jesus as "a prophet mighty in deed and word" that the translators were drawing a parallel. Luke-Acts is a two volume work and translating εργοω και λογω as 'word and deed' brings the phrase in line with the reference to Moses' "words and deeds" thus making explicit to the English reader the Jesus/Moses relationship. There is no direct evidence that this was part of the decision making by the NIV/NEB translators. It is worth noting that the NIV in subsequent revisions has persisted with word and deed whilst the REB has followed the Greek order of deed and word. A question remains. Even if the motivation was to make the word-deed statements cohere between Jesus and Moses, why did the translators decide not to make the reference to Moses cohere with the statement about Jesus?

In the sermon that arose out of my hearing and exploration of this passage I reflected:

> That the deed/word reversal of the Greek ordering takes place in relation to Jesus suggests to me that there is something significant going on,

> even if it is an unrecognised theological agenda. The deed/word reversal may have to do with the types of theological approaches that view truth as something beyond us revealed and then put into practice. It is the Word of systematic theology, doctrine, and orthodoxy being applied. Whether this arises out of conservative concerns for the inspired, inerrant Word of God, or the Barthian focus on orthodoxy guided by scripture and the confessions, it gives priority to word in relation to deed. Whatever the motivation the reversal of deed/word breaks a crucial lens through which to read this story.
>
> 'Jesus was a prophet mighty in deed and word' alerts us to the fact that actions define what we say. The death and resurrection of Jesus gives meaning to everything he said" (Boyd, 2012, p. 41).

What I identify here closely corresponds to the 'tale of two traditions' identified by Bennett and that the NIV and NEB were possibly translating largely out of type 1 "theory/theology to practice". Why is this significant? Because the choices made in translation are indicative of our theological starting point.

Having argued for the centrality of the deed-word nature of the ministry of Jesus, I highlight seven themes. I explore these dialogically between the scriptural text and the AR orientation. Let me be clear: Luke had no concept of AR or PT. I have no intention of naively imposing these contemporary disciplines onto the text. Rather, I bring them into a creative, imaginative conversation with Luke's emphasis on the deed-word of Jesus.

Body knowing

The deed-word relation points to the *physical nature of knowing*. I am not construing a dichotomy but rather arguing that deed and word are integral to each other and form a whole. The deed-word relation insists that 'word' or 'language' cannot exist in a disembodied form. Freire (1970, p. 68) expresses the interpenetration of action-reflection: "There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world." This resonates with the Lucan emphasis on deed/word as experiential and concrete rather than abstract. Jesus of Nazareth was not an idea. He was a person with a name who lived in a place and was perceived by others to be a prophet, effective in his doings and sayings.

The jolt I experienced in hearing 'word and deed' and the impetus to interrogate the text reflected my own epistemological shift. When I was operating in my theological home base (type 1, theory/theology to practice), it is probable that I would have been less alert to hear this phrase. Evidence for this earlier stance is in a

sermon I preached on Luke 24:13-25 entitled *Picking up the Crumbs* (04.2008). At the time I was using Today's NIV which was the 'pew' Bible being used in Cumnock Congregational Church. I make reference to Jesus' words and deeds but I do not explore the significance of the phrase. At this point I was already engaging with AR and PT and yet did not identify the linguistic discrepancy in the translation. It may be that the English version I was using obscured it from my sight.

Perhaps at this stage my engagement with AR and PT was not sufficient to cause me to question the translation of the text. I make the claim in the sermon that Jesus' words prepare them for the breaking of the bread:

> ...with the words of this stranger ringing in their ears…their hearts being fanned into the growing flame of understanding scripture…they were ready to recognise the Messiah. As the stranger takes bread, gives thanks to God, breaks it, crumbs scattering over table and floor, and shares it with them, recognition cascades over their consciousness.

This seems to indicate that my theological thinking at this point still gave priority to word(s). My continuing development as an action researcher increased my emphasis on action-reflection in terms of theological reflection. This prepared me for this serendipitous hearing of the text.

At this point it is important to reflect on the essence of the physical nature of epistemology. Epistemology has to do with the way we see the world and interpret it and asks how do we know what we know? The epistemological assumption that I have been developing in my practice is that knowledge is action oriented. Good theories are inherently practical. In the words of Lewin (1952, p. 169), "...there is nothing so practical as a good theory."

That knowledge is physical-perceptual is helpfully developed by Heywood (2004). He gives shape to the question of how we know the world by drawing upon Polanyi's concept of "tacit knowledge", that which is "...based on physical or bodily mechanisms and is holistically or globally organized" (2004, p. 24). Perception is physically embodied and is as such an action. Polanyi offers three analogies: riding a bicycle, being a chef and learning to drive. A mathematical formula can express what is happening when a bicycle is ridden but is hardly necessary for the cyclist to know in order to ride. A recipe book may be a useful tool but it will not create a competent chef. Equally, driving a car is not merely a matter of memorising the Highway Code (2004, pp. 25-26). "Polanyi proposed that perception be understood not as the passive contemplation of objects but as a bodily skill" (2004, p. 26). In

this thesis I demonstrate how my learning and that of the congregation was a 'bodily skill' (e.g. my physical learning in the wisdom and power dialogue, looking the congregation in the eye, finding a place to stand before the congregation etc...).

In terms of the Lucan text, the journey of the disciples with Jesus involves changes in their perception. It is in the physical action of taking the journey and sharing their table with him that involves a series of iterative moves that lead to recognition. The epistemological transformation cannot be understated. Their expectation of a redeemer for Israel had been disappointed and they were seeing the world in a state of confusion, caught between the first hand sight of Jesus being crucified and the glimmer of hope offered by the witness of the women. As they perceive Jesus in the broken bread they recall his words and understand the events of Jesus' death through the eyes of resurrection.

The deed-word nature of Jesus' ministry profoundly connected with the action-reflection approach I was utilising in imagining how I would come alongside my congregation in researching my practice. Troeger (1990, p. 53) in *Imagining a Sermon* gives truth a body when he writes, "But whether joyful or saddening, truth that matters has a bodily weight, a physical force on our animal frames. This should come as no surprise to Christians, who believe that 'the Word became flesh,' not a cloud or a thought but flesh, a human being." The truth of the risen Jesus of Nazareth comes through putting one foot in front of the other. It is 'doing'. It is 'way'. Truth is the sound of footfall, the feeling of anguish, the disorientation of foggy minds and weariness of tired bodies in search of words to make sense of their experience. Truth is the action of walking with Jesus, responding to his questions and listening to his words. The truth they are discovering arises from the truth they have already experienced of Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word. The somatic nature of truth is captured by Craddock (2001, p. 29) drawing upon the thought of J. L. Austin: "Words not only report something; they do something. Words are deeds."

The physicality of the story is striking not least in the fact that the two disciples identify Jesus with Nazareth, his geographical home. The importance of Nazareth in the Lucan narrative is, I would argue, evidenced in the account of Jesus' ministry beginning in Nazareth in the synagogue (4:16). Luke is careful to note the actions of the event. Jesus stands to read from the scroll and then takes the posture of a teacher and sits. "The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him" (4:20).

He was in the line of vision of those gathered. He did not provide the midrash (rabbinic interpretation of scripture) they expected. Instead, the Lucan Jesus said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). The synagogue congregation see but do not recognise Jesus as the embodiment of the words of the prophet. It is only when Jesus speaks of the hospitality of the Sidonian widow and of the welcome Elisha extended to Naaman the Syrian through healing him of leprosy that the assembly perceive what Jesus is saying: Israel was inhospitable to the prophets and lepers were not healed because of it. They are enraged and drive Jesus from the heart of the community to a cliff edge to be executed. Those in the Nazareth synagogue had seen but not perceived, heard but not understood. Cleopas and the other disciple rightly identify Jesus with Nazareth and yet they too do not recognise Jesus. Will they come to see and understand? The synagogue had evicted Jesus. Will these disciples show hostility or hospitality to this stranger?

Hospitality and dialogue

I treat these two themes together as they intertwine each with the other. The deed-word relation I draw from the narrative is the theme of *hospitality*. Jesus is welcomed to sojourn with the disciples. This feature resonates with the core of our research process which depended on welcoming the 'stranger'. We exercised mutual hospitality as we chose to welcome each other in creating a space for having a conversation about my practice of preaching and their experience of it.

This hospitality makes *dialogue* possible. Jesus' entry into the conversation that the two disciples were having is as an inquirer not as one who imparts an explanation to them. This corresponds to the question-posing nature of dialogue that is characteristic of the co-inquiry of AR. It resonates with Freire's (1970, p. 61) teacher-as-student and student-as-teacher relationship.

Jesus asks two questions. The first is about content: "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" My presupposition is that this is not a contrived question based on a 'supernatural' power derived from Jesus' divinity. Rather he genuinely poses it in order to discover what they have been talking about. Luke gives details of their physical response to Jesus question: they stood still looking sad. Jesus' question stops them in their tracks and puts them in touch with how they are feeling about the situation which is expressed through their visage.

Incredulous, they ask him if he is the only "stranger in Jerusalem" to have missed out on the events "that have taken place there". Jesus responds with a second question, "What things?" This question invites them to tell their story. Their account of the happenings is shot through with their sense of confusion.

Having identified hospitality as an essential disposition for dialogue, I would suggest that hospitality requires the formation of particular virtues. It is of interest to me that this text is identified by Cameron *et al*. (2012, pp. 9-15) as illustrative of theological reflection and is unpacked in terms of Reader's concept of 'blurred encounters'. The disciples are propelled into a process of sense making as the disruptive crisis of the cross forces them to revaluate their old certainties of "meaning and identity" (2012, p. 11). Reader and Baker (referred to in 2012, p. 12) suggest that the dialogical encounter is possible only if there is "...an attitude of openness..." marked by the virtues of "...authenticity and faithfulness" rooted in authentic awareness of our own traditions and assumptions. Hospitality is the womb that gives birth to dialogue, a conversation marked by grounding in our own identities and traditions with attentiveness to the Other (their actions/inactions, words and silences).

A significant aspect of the Word Café was that of joining conversations already begun. Conversations about preaching and how to explore my practice had taken place in the March 2010 Church Meeting and the co-planning meetings that followed. During each stage of the Word Café process participants moved from an existing conversation into a new conversation facilitated by hosts on each table. Participants were encouraged not only to speak but to listen. Asking questions of each other was crucial to the inquiry process.

The dialogue is deepened in the invitation to Jesus to enter their home and eat at their table. It is in the intimacy of sharing a meal that their perception of Jesus comes into the sharp focus of recognition. Hospitality is necessary to make space for the kind of dialogue that leads to understanding and appropriate action. The disciples' recognition of Jesus was the impetus for the action of returning to Jerusalem and bearing witness.

I would relate the disciples' movement from not recognising to having their eyes opened with Freire's (1970, p. 49) key idea that liberation arises out of raised consciousness. The method through which conscientization occurs is through dialogue and "the essence of dialogue" is "*the word*" (1970, p. 68, italics original).

The hospitality that makes dialogue possible is love. "Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (1970, p. 70).

Presently, I want to demonstrate another potential for dialogue. Is it possible for a mutual conversation between scripture and sociological concepts to yield fresh perspectives without conflating the two? I explore this through the word δοξα. In Luke 24:26 and the rest of the New Testament, δοξα means 'glory' and in sociology refers to a settled and unquestioned reality.

In the dialogue that Jesus has with the two disciples, he comes to challenge their foolishness, or lack of wisdom. He interprets the scriptures and explains to them that the Messiah had to make the necessary move from suffering to glory (δοξα). His insistence that suffering is a precursor to glory defied messianic expectations. In the ancient world the notion of glory was associated with elevated social standing and wealth. The messianic hope was centred on the redemption of Israel. The idea of the Messiah suffering crucifixion flew in the face of the expectations of his glory. Jesus' interpretation of the prophets and the scriptures with regard to the Messiah was a reconfiguration of the essence of δοξα.

The use of the word δοξα in this biblical passage triggered a connection with with Freire's (1970) use of the term δοξα which led me on to explore Bourdieu's usage. I start with Bourdieu (1977, p. 164) who defines δοξα as a state in which "...the natural and social world appears as self-evident." Δοξα is 'reality' that is assumed which goes unquestioned and is beyond the reach of discussion. He names this the "universe of the undiscussed" and posits that it is only possible for δοξα to be challenged by the "universe of discourse". The disruption of δοξα is occasioned by "crisis" - though not always. Those in society whose interests are served by the δοξα will martial all the resources of "orthodoxy" (attempts at "restoring a primal state of innocence of doxa") to stifle discourse (1977, pp. 168-169).

Clearly Bourdieu's use of δοξα is quite distinct from the glory Jesus is talking about. However, if I critically correlate the modern sociological concept of δοξα to the δοξα of the biblical text, I would suggest that Jesus' radical redefinition of the Messiah's δοξα is 'disruptive'. The dialogue that took place on the road to Emmaus is occasioned by a 'crisis'. Through the 'discourse' between Jesus and the disciples the meaning of the Messiah's glory and of those who would follow him is reconfigured.

Freire (1970, p. 62) offers this treatment of δοξα writing of a move from δοξα to λογος. This is an educative process in which

> The students - no longer docile listeners - are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*.

Logos is the articulation of reality through problem posing and solving. Freire and Bourdieu's emphasis on dialogue is echoed in the work of Habermas' *logos* of language, or ideal speech situation. Transformation occurs when assumed reality (δοξα) is challenged through dialogue (λογος).

Freire could well have been describing the pedagogy of Jesus. Jesus' response to the disciples in vv. 25-27 arises out of his questions and attentiveness to their response. The journey on the Emmaus road and the act of breaking bread are part of action-reflection learning. Their expectation of Jesus as the redeemer of Israel is shattered by his suffering and crucifixion. As I have already argued, the δοξα of the world in which these disciples live insists that there is no glory in suffering. In their dialogue with Jesus they clearly bring their knowledge and understanding and yet their assumption about the δοξα of the Messiah prevents them from reconciling their hopes with the reality of his death. The λογος moment is when Jesus is disclosed to them in the fragmentation of the bread which enables them to express their recognition of the truth about his suffering and glory. In the action of breaking bread they see him and they have memories of 'burning hearts' in which assumed reality (δοξα) is given over to what is really real (λογος) (1970, p. 60). The λογος is the coming together of the journey and the shared meal in recognition of Jesus and the nature of the Messiah's δοξα through suffering.

In my own inquiry, the Word Café arose from a dialogical process of questioning and problem-posing. We created a hospitable space for discourse (λογος) to unsettle the δοξα of my practice. Midway through the research process a Word Café participant commented, "It's v. fruitful this reflecting on the sermon, either at the word café or on my own. I came across a quote which I think describes what's going on: 'The teacher and the taught together create the teaching'" (written reflection for 17.04.2011). In my thesis I demonstrate the way in which participants

expressed their sense of being listened to (by one another and me) and of contributing to the understanding of the community (in that emergent themes eventuated in action).

Authority of experience and theology from above

The deed-word relation of the narrative aids us in teasing out our contemporary understandings of *the relationship of authority between theology and experience/practice*. This takes us back to Bennett's typology as a useful way of understanding the various responses to this question. The first type is represented in Swinton and Mowatt (2006). This stands in contrast with Pattison's (2000b) method of "mutual critical correlation", a type 2 approach and putting PT on an equal footing with other disciplines. Bennett (2013, p. 20) goes further proposing type 3 in which priority is given to life experience arguing that "...in the Bible itself the text of scripture is subordinated to the text of life: life comes first."

Using Bennett's 'tale of two traditions' as a depiction of the tension, I want to explore whether the deed-word relation bears any relation to these polarities. I could be accused of over-egging the significance of deed preceding word. It could be argued that Jesus offers a word to the disciples as he gives an authoritative account of the meaning of scriptures in relation to him. I would highlight that the disciples are not brought to the point of recognising Jesus through his 'authoritative' explanation of scripture. Rather it is through their experience of recognising Jesus in the action of breaking the bread that his interpretation of the scriptures was understood. The 'truth' of Jesus being alive was perceived through the experience of an action. This action involved the deeds of taking, breaking and giving, and words of blessing set within a communal tradition (*habitus*). The context of what was said and done at the table was the dialogue that had taken place on the road. I argue that the mutuality of deed-word resists the extremes of Bennett's two traditions, weaving together the deed and the word as essential one to the other.

Familiar made strange

The deed-word relation of the Emmaus journey points to *the familiar being made strange*. The disciples' eyes are kept from recognising Jesus. Yet though they do not know who they are talking to they show perception about who Jesus is as a prophet mighty in deed and word. It is in making the journey and sharing bread that

the familiar-made-strange is recognised. Crucially, having their eyes opened to Jesus' identity is not to see him as 'familiar'. Indeed though they know who he is he is quite different. He is raised from the dead. On this basis I am proposing that the familiar-made-strange leads to seeing something familiar quite differently. In the moment that their eyes are opened Jesus vanishes from sight. This detail in the narrative resists notions that the risen Lord may be captured as an eternal truth (theology from above). They will continue to know the risen Jesus through their experience of him through the Holy Spirit in the community of faith.

Adams (2011, p. 7) grapples with the whole question of vision: "Frost works with the metaphor of sight, two ways of seeing, one shaped by a sense of purpose in the world and the other by action in the world. Unless 'my two eyes make one in sight' the world is blurred, and impossible to harmonise." The Lucan narrative emphasises the centrality of Jerusalem to the action of God. This is explicit in that the message of "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed...beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Luke's narrative uniquely begins and ends in Jerusalem and it is from Jerusalem that the proclamation will ripple out to all the nations of the world in Acts. Therefore, it is no small detail that these two disciples go away from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. For them, the death of Jesus had robbed them of their understanding of what Jesus had done and said. Going to Emmaus was a return to their default position.

I would suggest that the 'two eyes making one sight' occurs in the deed-word of taking, blessing, breaking and giving of the bread. This performative word opens their eyes in recognition and they recognise Jesus but in a new way. He is alive and this reality returns them to their purpose in Jerusalem. We hear their breathlessness as they rush back to Jerusalem with news of the familiar-made-strange now known to be the risen Jesus. They do this by telling the story of what "happened" (24:35) on the road. This is an act of sense-making which culminates in Jesus who is "...made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (24:35). Their knowledge of the risen Jesus centred on this action.

Word Café was a particular method that was consistent with AR and the themes raised by this biblical text. It made our familiar experience of preaching strange and enabled us to see my practice in a renewed way. As a method, Word Café expressed our mutual learning by being a holistic physical experience (eating, speaking, listening, writing and drawing) marked by hospitality and dialogue. It

facilitated the manner of doing theology in which the experiential (deed) was the context for the conversations (word). In Chapters 5, 6, and 7 we will examine particular themes that emerged and led to a deepening of the dialogue and to new/renewed practices consistent with transformation and human flourishing in our local context.

Burning hearts

In the biblical text the moment of recognition occurs in the breaking of the bread followed by *hearts burning within*. In the action of breaking bread the words exchanged on the journey are understood, not merely at a cognitive level but affectively. Through the Word Café participants expressed the importance of the role of food in deepening fellowship and in opening the way for meaningful conversations. Word Café had something of the quality of ritual about it and as people became familiar and comfortable with the practice there was the impression that the dialogue became richer in quality as there was a greater level of perception.

The disciples' ruminations in the light of having their eyes opened to Jesus' identity in broken bread corresponds to reflection in both AR and the Ignatian exercises. Coghlan writes (2005, p. 96):

> *Reflection* is the thoughtful consideration of some experience in order to grasp its significance; it is the process by which meaning is articulated. Through use of the memory, understanding, imagination and feelings, reflection enables discovery of the relationship with other experiences and appreciation of their implications in the ongoing search for truth and freedom. Ignatian spirituality reflection is inclusive of reflection from the perspective of religious faith and enables reflection on experiences of God in prayer and daily living.

The disciples experience a journey and remember Jesus' words through the lens of broken bread. For us, the Word Café was a reflective space which intentionally wove together the elements of thoughts, feelings, memories and invited response to the preaching event and a commitment to change.

Silenced women

The *silenced voices of women* is a theme that I have excavated from the narrative. The identity of the other disciple with Cleopas has been the subject of speculation. Was the other disciple his wife? It is impossible to establish whether this is so. In the light of Luke giving attention to the identity of women disciples

elsewhere in his gospel, it seems odd that he would miss the opportunity to do so here. I am going to assume that both disciples are men as their confusion and lack of perception provide a foil to the women at the tomb. The women hear the words of the two men in dazzling cloths and this prompts them to remember Jesus' words about his betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection. The contrast between the believing response of the women disciples and that of the two travellers is in keeping with the significant role of women in Luke's Gospel [e.g. Elizabeth, Mary and Anna (Lk. 1-2); Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (8:1-3); women from Galilee (23:49)]. It is remarkable that in a male-dominated world, women's actions and words find their way into the fabric of Luke's Gospel at all. However, the presence of women in the Lucan account should not blind us to the way in which they are silenced post-resurrection.

A feminist reading of this text alerts me to pay attention to the role of women. Graham (2002, p. 96, italics original) locates the crucible of pastoral theology in "a *turn to practice*". In particular she examines feminist practice as theology. She identifies women's experience as the primary "source and norm" as a challenge to the patriarchalism of Christian scripture, doctrine, tradition and history (2002, p. 174). Graham critically examines feminist *praxis* in terms of women's experience, tradition, and community of faith. Her treatment of feminist *praxis* of preaching is of particular significance. She examines each *praxis* using the concept she has developed out of Critical Theory and "feminist situated practice" (2002, p. 173). She names these "...*disclosive practices*. These seek to forge notions of human identity and agency, and of ultimate truth, as provisional and situated, yet grounded in a precommitment to a common humanity and the possibilities of ethical action" (2002, p. 173, italics original).

Disclosure stands in opposition to "'closure'" which Graham (2002, p. 160) defines as "...absolute, disembodied and oppressive prescriptions which represent some sort of deathly and pathological denial of alternative and dissonant knowledge." Scripture is identified, along with Christian doctrine and history as part of the tradition, as "androcentric" and therefore problematic as a source and norm for feminist theology (2002, p. 174).

Graham (2002, p. 198) draws attention to the approach of Fiorenza (1983) to interpreting scripture because it is "public" and open to debate but also committed to the feminist approach. Fiorenza's (1983, 349-351, in 2002, p. 197) interpretive lens

assumes the values of *agape* rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and lived out through the "'*ekklesia* of equals'". It is the practices of the Christian community embodying the pursuit of justice which have authority. Scripture as a source is judged by the assumption of gender equality rooted in the liberative vision lived by Christ and the community he formed.

The feminist approach alerts me to the way in which women are marginalised in the post-resurrection witnessing community. The women's words are dismissed as an "idle tale" (24:11). Their voice of witness is not believed though Peter responds to their story by going to check the tomb. At the point at which the disciple and Cleopas do see and believe, their witness in Jerusalem is met by Peter's prior encounter with the risen Lord. The women who speak an idle tale and who have astounded the community are no longer heard. It is the eye-witness account of the two disciples and Peter that 'counts'. The women who believed the words of the men in dazzling clothes *without* seeing the risen Jesus are 'discounted'. Their voice is submerged by the male chorus affirming Jesus' resurrection.

In Witney Congregational Church women are in the majority in terms of membership and the diaconate. There are two ordained women. Women lead, worship and preach. In the Word Café women contributed. Were their voices heard or marginalised? It is impossible to answer this question decisively as this question was not explicitly considered by women participants. In future cycles of inquiry this would be a pivotal issue for consideration. I can confirm that in all of the themes I explore in this thesis women's voices were central to my learning. The anonymizing of participants means that this is not apparent in text. In terms of 'The Emmaus Road', just as Luke's inclusion of women in the narrative of the Gospel is not sustained post-resurrection, so it is of ongoing importance for me to read the 'text' of my congregation and continue to examine critically the extent of women's inclusion-exclusion.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have shown how action research as a way of doing theology is an ART by showing how I have acted with intuition and reason as I reflected on my tradition of using the Bible and how it evolved into a critical moment of hearing. In analysing the relation of 'deed and word' I grappled with seven theological and AR themes which emerged and looked at them in an intertwining manner. I

considered the physical nature of knowing and went on to explore how hospitality opens space for dialogue. I went on to consider the relationship of authority in dialogue between PT and AR. Further themes suggested in my encounter with the text was how the familiar was made strange, of reflection (or hearts burning within), and of the silenced voices of women. I have demonstrated that my experience of hearing the Bible was dialogical. This moment of listening to the Bible leads on to that of listening to my congregation and to my own self.

CHAPTER 5
LOOKING THE CONGREGATION IN THE EYE: THE NAKED PREACHER

...The cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter.
Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord...
"Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times."
And he went out and wept bitterly
(Luke 22:60-61).

INTRODUCTION

My passion for ART is located in the insistence that action and reflection are part of a single movement of *praxis*. This inquiry into my own practice is, as I understand it, the doing of theology. As *praxis* demands that all theorising emerges from action so articulated theology grows out of the practices and experiences of faith communities. So far, I have shown that my research is interdisciplinary and as such my story is a conversation with action researchers and practical theologians as well as other sources that offer insight and challenge. The picture I have painted of AR resists the label of being a 'discipline' (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003, pp. 23-24). Equally there are strong voices in PT that are blurring its disciplinary boundaries by calling for "interdisciplinary theology" (Ghiloni, 2013). The dialogue between AR and PT (and thus the emergence of ART) entertains rich possibilities due to the acknowledged influence of Dewey on both 'disciplines'. Coghlan (2008b, p. 212) traces the origins of AR "...in such diverse fields as: the social psychology experiments of Kurt Lewin, the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey and the emergent field of organisation and development, the liberationist work of Paolo Freire, Catholic action, liberation theology, and feminist thought." His claim of theological sources within the diverse family of AR is echoed by practical theologian, Ghiloni (2013, p. 18), who boldly claims that "Democratic pragmatism, with its emphasis on practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), has provided inspiration for the development of modern practical theology...." The doing of this kind of theology requires good vision.

"Listen with your eyes and sing everything you see..." is a phrase from the traditional nursery rhyme song *I can sing a rainbow*. This song suggested itself to me in the process of writing this narrative. Listening with my eyes is seeing 'me' in the world, a holistic attention to my thoughts and feelings as I encounter others in the world. 'Listening eyes' is akin to Torbert and Taylor's (2008, p. 242) "...triple-loop,

first person 'supervision'..." which is one of the four territories of experience which he calls "vision/attention/intention". This is an aware, purposeful kind of seeing across the other territories of mindful thought, sensed feeling of behaviour, and the outside world experienced "through the soles of my feet" (2008, pp. 241-242). This kind of vision enables us to perceive "...fit (*congruance*) or of incongruity (*dissonance*) as they become known to an acting system (through its *assonance*) in real time" (2008, p. 241, italics original). It is significant that Torbert refers to the Ignatian spiritual exercises in the work of Coghlan. Coghlan (2005, p. 98) argues that the territories of intentionality, planning, action and outcomes "...are explicit in Ignatian spirituality." Of course both AR and Ignatian spirituality are practices which have fostered attentional skills in me. By 'attentional' I mean a sight that comes through listening to my inner and outer experiences in the world.

Following the nursery song, listening with my eyes invites me to sing everything I see. Having listening eyes is to sing in the four voices ("parts of speech") (Torbert & Taylor, 2008, p. 244). Each voice roughly corresponds to the territories of experience and serves the second person inquiry. The *framing* voice focuses vision-attention. The voice of *advocacy* gives shape to thoughts. The *illustrating* voice shapes thoughts into a concrete story about actions/behaviours. The *inquiring* voice asks questions of others in order to discover and learn from the outside world. My account is of growing towards this kind of listening with my eyes, a vision in which my gaze meets the gaze of the Other through dialogue, and joining with a choir of voices singing what I've seen *with* others.

I begin by constructing a critical narrative out of the various research data sources which bear witness to a moment of *eureka*. On the basis of this personal insight and transformation of my own practice through collaborative inquiry, I go on to explore a central practice for ART: attention.

In this chapter I hone in on a narrative of 'looking the congregation in the eye'. I take you through particular cycles of learning which occurred over the course of my inquiry which enabled me to confront my vulnerability as a preacher. As the story unfolds I critically analyse my experience in terms of a variety of sources. Coghlan (2011, p. 54), though writing with a particular focus on organisational change, captures the overall thrust of what took place for me through my ART: "...as an emergent inquiry process, it engages in an unfolding story, where data shift as a consequence of intervention and where it is not possible to predict or to control what

takes place." The learning that I critically analyse is both a first and second person inquiry. I demonstrate first person learning through showing my deepening awareness of self in relation to others and how I learned to act with greater attention in the moment rather than to reach a conclusion about 'what happened'. It is second person inquiry in that insight into my own practice was raised through the co-researching process. This is my story: the story of the naked preacher.

SEEING WITH THE NAKED EYE

This is the account of an epiphany but not of the sudden, instantaneous kind in which, in a moment, everything made sense, the kind of knowing that Adams (2011, p. 121) describes as an "aha moment" when "the penny drops". Rather it was a revelation over a long period of time that required a dialogical jolt (dissonance) to derail me which then invited me to lay down a new track (congruety). My derailment came in the comments of two Word Café participants:

> Jason looking to the side seems to disturbe [sic] me today (6.02.2011, Table 8 WS 5).
> Your sermon drew me in but was distracted by whatching [sic] you talk too, above my head (6.02.2011, Table 8 WS 2).

In my reflections I considered the way in which "These written comments combined with conversations that I have had with participants even as far back as the co-planning meetings in May and June, arrested my attention" (R, 6.02.2011). It was not that my lack of eye contact had not been made known to me. Yet somehow the words of these participants were sufficient to face me with a phenomenon in my practice which forced me to engage in sense-making and to devise a strategy for change in my practice. I had framed my practice in a particular way and the dialogue necessitated a re-framing of my vision-attention.

This moment when my attention was arrested was part of a stream of experiential shifts in my practice of preaching the Bible that moved me towards looking the congregation in the eye. My first encounter with AR evolved into a pilot project for researching my own practice of preaching in 2006. One of the specific issues I wrestled with was my relationship to the manuscript in the act of preaching. It dawned on me that I would never consider speaking from a prepared script when speaking to children or young people in religious assemblies, nor would I do the same when conducting all age worship. During the pilot project I made an attempt to put aside my sermon manuscript and preach without notes. This was a terrifying

experience and a throwaway sexist comment during this sermon led me to conclude that this was a dangerous way for me to preach. Instead of entering into a critical, self-reflexive inquiry into what it was within me that had found expression in my words (cf. Mark 7:15), I decided that the text of a sermon manuscript was the best way to stay safe.

Another significant encounter was on 20 July 2009 when I met with David Spriggs, post-graduate supervisor of scholars of the Bible Society. I was talking about my pilot project and shared my conclusion that preaching from a manuscript was the right approach for me. I recall his remark that if the preacher could not remember the sermon how on earth should a congregation be expected to remember it! I wrote, "David challenged me to lay aside notes. I'm not sure" (SJ, 21.07.2009). My hesitancy gave way to the resolve to act. On Sunday I confided, "I am in the storm. I have made the decision to preach without notes. Although I've prepared the full manuscript I'm going to leave it in my study. I am terrified. As I pray my heart pounds with fear. What if I get lost? What if I lose direction? What if I sink? Lord, I am afraid" (SJ, 26.07.2009). The next day I reflected that "It seems like it isn't much (perhaps to others) but for me preaching without my manuscript is a colossal obstacle that fills me with fear. Will my memory fail? Will I say something I wish I hadn't said? Will I run over time? Will I lose fluency? Will I be accurate? I have to do the meticulous, prayerful preparation and <u>then</u> with this groundwork done trust God for strength" (SJ, 27.07.2009). In leaving my manuscript to the side (a change in behaviour) I made an assumption that I was "...looking at and being immediate to the congregation" (PJ, 23.02.2011). This particular framing of my action was in need of re-framing but I could not see it yet. Single loop learning (change of action) had taken place but it remained for double loop (change of thinking) and triple loop (change of being) learning to occur (D. M. Adams, 2011, pp. 86-87).

The revelation that I was not looking the congregation in the eye had persistently called for my attention through a number of encounters. Viviane had frequently "...observed that I'm looking at the floor or sweeping from side to side or looking just above people's heads or the ceiling of the church" (PJ, 23.02.2011). Why had I not allowed her insight to be a catalyst of change? Was it because of her close relationship to me that I advocated my actions with plausible explanations: "...When I used manuscripts I couldn't look at people because I was too busy trying

to read and create the illusion that I was looking at people at the same time. Now that I don't use manuscripts, I don't feel able to look at people because I'm too busy trying to remember what I'm going to say. Looking at people creates a kind of distraction that I am frightened will dislodge my thought processes" (PJ, 23.02.2011). It was the experience of dissonance in reading the comments of these participants that forced me to hear Viviane in a way I had not heard her before.

To some extent I had an inkling that what she said rang true. After the first Word Café I noted my reaction to watching the video of my preaching, "...I watched myself leading worship and preaching. There was less eye contact. I tended to sweep from side to side and look up or close my eyes" (R, 07.11.2010). I attributed this behaviour to being nervous for this first of the preaching events. In the same reflection I recorded that someone who had not been present at the Word Café preaching event pointed out the way in which I close my eyes before making what they referred to as a "profound" point. This stimulated me to watch the video recording again and my response was that "I was not conscious that I do this...I need to reflect on whether this is a distracting habit or a genuine bodily expression of reflecting as I think/speak."

The dissonance created by the comments made in the Word Café session triggered the memory of a dialogue during a co-planning meeting (PPPM, 09.06.2010, group 1):

> ***A***: I used to think, I don't think it now because I'm, I'm homing in on you more now but I used to think that you were looking at the wall
> ***JB***: Um.
> ***A***: Looking at the back wall and not looking at us and I said this to *D* at times. I said he's not looking at anybody in the audience, you know what I mean in the...
> (*Cross talk*)
> ***A***: ...you were looking at the wall and I thought well, you've only just come, come on, that's not fair but I don't think of that any more now because I'm I am watching you more (I can't think of the word) deeply now and…
> ***Y***: How did that make you feel?
> ***A***: I, well, he's embarrassed, he's shy, he doesn't know us and he's looking at the walls.
> ***B***: Looking beyond you.
> ***A***: Yes, but is, is that horrible, is that mean?
> ***JB***: I'm not sure whether it was this group that discussed it or whether it was one of the other groups but the move from notes.
> ***A***: Oh, there's no notes, no notes at all which we I we think is wonderful, I mean, how do you remember everything?

JB: But the thing of it is *A*, what I am suggesting is when I first came I was still using notes. I was using notes up until last July.
A: Oh right, well I didn't realise that
JB: ...and so that, that's, but it's an interesting observation that you're making because I was conscious that I wasn't looking at anybody. I couldn't look at anybody because I was just looking up and then…
A: Well, you've got so much to think about.

My single loop assumption that preaching without a manuscript was sufficient to ensure I was making eye contact with the congregation prevented me from hearing what ***A*** might be saying. Indeed I may have understood ***A*** correctly. However it seems unlikely as she was quite clear that she knew that I did not use notes and that she was unaware of the change from manuscript to memory. Her perspective resonated with ***B*** who affirmed the impression that I was looking beyond people. The critical issue here is that my unquestioning belief about my practice blocked my listening vision. In this exchange I did not ask any questions but rather offered interpretive statements. My unquestioned governing value prevented second loop learning and I certainly was not approaching triple loop visioning.

Campbell (1986) reflects on the nature of authentic listening in the specific context of the helping relationship. His insights into listening illumine the dialogical space in inquiry. He is clear that listening is by no means as easy as it seems. One of the principle difficulties relate to "...our natural tendency to try to formulate an interpretation of what we hear as quickly as possible to prepare for rapid action" (1986, p. 103). We listen egotistically, rushing to make sense of what the other person is saying so that we are able to offer a course of action. "...One can scarcely hear the other person for the clamour of one's own inner voices, which frantically search for a solution, mentally formulating answers to questions which have not even been asked!" (1986, p. 103) I heard ***A*** but did not listen to her because I had already decided that I knew what she meant. This was compounded by the fact that I did not ask her questions and this may have been driven by the sense of threat to my ego. I thought the enormous step of preaching without notes had resolved all the issues of immediacy with my congregation and so I was protecting myself against the disappointment that this was not enough and there was more to be done. Listening is hard work because it requires energetic attention. Campbell (1986, p. 103) insists that a genuine listening disposition is non-egotistical in which, "...we can shut off both inner and outer noise and allow the other person to fill our attention." I question

whether it is realistic or even desirable to "shut off" in this way. I would advocate that listening is about being aware of the inner and the outer noise and allowing the other person's voice to be heard through it. In the context of a discussion of pastoral supervision, Leach and Paterson (p. 82) assert that any attempt by a supervisor to "...leave themselves outside the supervision room..." is an illusion. The listening supervisor is to be wholly present in their being whilst ensuring that they do not subvert the relationship by using it as an opportunity to "...having their own needs met through the encounter..." (2010, p. 82) Nonetheless, Campbell offers a helpful "...analogy of listening to music with appreciation rather than with half an ear to other sounds..." (1986, p. 103).

A's response to ***Y's*** question about how this 'not looking' made her feel held generative potential for re-framing which I was unable to discern at that moment in time. ***A*** perceived that I was "embarrassed" and "shy" and attributed this to the fact that I did not know the congregation very well. It was only when I returned to these comments following the dialogical jolt of the 6 February 2011 Word Café that I was able to "...reflect on what I am doing" (PJ, 23.02.2011) and attend to ***A's*** insights. I asked myself questions: "Why am I so afraid of looking at my congregation? Why did I ever think it was OK to look at people without 'looking'?" I continue, "I recognise that I do not look at people. In fact, I am aware that my lack of eye contact/engagement is so entrenched that I'm not aware of who is in church except on the basis of who I've seen come in before the service or who I meet at the door on the way out. This is not merely during the sermon but during the whole service" (PJ, 23.02.2011). Aware of this I chose to act differently by pausing before the start of the service and noticing who was present. I found that in this simple move I was "...freed to look at people more directly during the sermon" (PJ, 23.02.2011).

This new action was accompanied by a critical interrogation of why I found it so difficult to look people in the eye and be aware of them. It was becoming clear to me that

> It is not merely a question of 'connecting' during the sermon but of a wider issue to do with my reluctance to look at the people I am worshipping with. Why is this? I can only explain my feeling as 'embarrassment' or a kind of self-consciousness akin to the dream of being in a room full of people I know and suddenly finding myself undressed. I suppose when I lead worship and preach I feel exposed...naked...vulnerable. If I don't look at people then I cannot see their reaction to me. I cannot see agreement, disagreement, boredom or whatever. If I don't look then I can bulldoze through what I've got to do and

> say. But what if in connecting with people by looking at them and making eye contact I loose [sic] my place. What if I discover that I'm a complete fool? What if I see that no one is listening? What if I notice that someone has drifted off or fallen asleep? ...
>
> I'm not sure what to make of this. Maybe there is nothing to make of it – at least for now. The word 'vulnerability' does seem to be important in some way (PJ, 23.02.2011).

Is it possible that the dialogical jolt that had taken me back to ***A's*** perception that I was embarrassed and shy had enabled me to identify my affective disposition of embarrassment and existential vulnerability in the preaching event?

A nightmare of nakedness

My awareness that I was not looking people in the eye and the growing recognition that this was rooted in feelings of embarrassment triggered the memory of a particular dream of nakedness. This dream functioned as a metaphor that helped me to unpack what was going on in my inhibition to make eye contact. In the weeks that followed the metaphor of nakedness was not only a way of understanding what was happening for me as I preached but also created insight into AR itself. Following a meeting with one of my supervisors there was a deepening of insight:

> It occurred to me as I walked from Wayne's office to the car that Action Research [sic] as a way of doing theology in the practice of preaching is a way of being stripped naked. The nakedness of my dream...the knowledge that I haven't any clothes on and yet no one seems to notice – or at least no one has the courage to tell me – paralyses me. I am not able to leave the room and get dressed. Leaving the room might require an explanation. I will have to tell them I'm naked. What then? Perhaps they'll say, "Actually, we knew all along but we didn't tell you because we didn't want to embarrass you."
>
> Action Research [sic] as a way of doing theology is a way of making our practices and beliefs explicit. It is exposing the differential/integrity between/of espoused theory and theory in practice. Naming the nakedness is not something of which to be ashamed or frightened. Instead the nakedness is acknowledging with humility the way things are. It is opening up the lines of communication that enable people to speak of reality as they perceive it instead of staying silent to avoid embarrassment.
>
> The fear that I have experienced in the process of researching my practice with my congregation is expressed through this dream. There is the part of me that wishes that everyone knew I was naked so that I could do something about it. There's another part of me that is the animal caught in the headlights. I know my nakedness but I'm blind to how other people see me. Do they know? I'm paralysed. In preaching there is the fear that what I do and say will lack

> integrity and that people will perceive my nakedness. I can't look anyone in the eye or else I will give myself away. The anxiety surrounding the Word Café – the events – the transcribing – the watching of the video – the reflecting – is rooted in my vulnerability to being exposed as naked.
>
> I think that the reticence of some people to take part may be related to a similar kind of fear: the fear that they haven't got anything to say; the fear that what they say might hurt me; the fear that they might hear people saying hurtful/nasty things; the fear that they might be exposed as being 'stupid'; the fear that people will discover their lack of biblical knowledge or theological fluency.
>
> Anyway...I blurt these things out because the dream seems so important to me in unlocking my own understanding of what is going on (PJ, 30.03.2011).

The dream metaphor enabled me to identify my embarrassment and fear of being exposed both in preaching and in my action inquiry. What is more I became aware of the nakedness that participants in the Word Café might experience. When participant ***A*** expressed her views in the co-planning process, she judged as "horrible" her expressed perceptions of me. Her remark may be indicative of a concern that she had said too much and in so doing risked her relationship to me and others in the group.

Nakedness in the Bible

I now turn to biblical sources in exploring the nature of nakedness. I recognise that I am approaching these texts as a way of understanding my own AR process. I am not approaching the texts in terms of critical biblical scholarship. My intention is not to violate the texts but to attend to the insights that they offer in the horizon of the here and now.

My reflections on nakedness resonate with Moore's (2007) association of knowing and nakedness with insider AR. He compares insider action inquiry to the eating of the forbidden fruit which follows Adam and Eve having their eyes opened and seeing their nakedness. The opening of eyes is having the knowledge of good and evil. His inquiry not only exposed the need for change within his own organisation but involved baring himself in the process. He writes that "Although I was left feeling liberated, I also realized I was naked. Having become more self-conscious and aware of my views and beliefs, I realized that I didn't necessarily want others to see what I was really like...I was human and had as a consequence at times been proud and petty, vain and vengeful, superior and selfish" (2007, p. 34). The

biblical reference to the nakedness of the first humans is a metaphorical expression of the insight and exposure I've experienced through ART.

Luke 22:60-61 captures the moment when the eyes of Jesus meet with Peter's. It is an instant of anguished failure as Peter retreats into the isolation of bitter weeping. Peter's bold promise of loyalty to the death is emptied of meaning and he is exposed: naked. What if my eyes meet with those of my congregation and my preaching is hollowed out by hypocrisy and I stand naked?

There is another biblical reference to nakedness that offers a deepening of insight. "A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked" (Mark 14:51-52). Was this young man Peter? Whatever the case, this offers a distinctly different metaphor of nakedness to that of the Genesis account, in which the taking of the forbidden fruit leads to an opening of the eyes. It was an intentional act to be like God in knowing good and evil. This account of a young man that is stripped offers a different insight in terms of AR. His intention to follow evaporates into fleeing in fear and this cannot be hidden. The comment that he runs off naked conjures up the image of one whose failure is exposed by another. These cycles of inquiry involved my desire to follow Jesus and to stay with the frightening process of gaining insight into my own practice. Shot through these cycles was the urge to run and escape risking exposure. However the AR orientation seized hold of my cover up. My flight from the insights of my wife and the participants in the co-planning meeting were my own nakedness that I could not see because my fear clouded my vision. It was the action inquiry in the communicative space of Word Café that made my nakedness visible to me.

Entwined into the fear of nakedness is the matter of failure. In writing of failure, Pattison (2007, p. 159) quotes Williams (1982, p. 36) who writes of Peter being forgiven and commissioned:

> ...the memory of failure is in this context the indispensable basis of a calling forward in hope. Peter, in being present to Jesus, becomes - painfully and nakedly - present to himself: but that restoration to him of an identity of failure is also the restoration of an identity of hope.

The courage to look the congregation in the eye comes from being able to look myself in the eye. The courage to look myself in the eye comes from the courage to look into the eyes of Jesus. It is the ability to be present to myself in relation to

others and to engage in triple loop learning: listening with my eyes and singing what I see. This is a visioning that attends to whole life experience and does not attempt to obscure or erase failure. Instead, when failure is acknowledged and reflected upon, it has the potential for an enormous amount of learning. Mellor (2001, p. 474) is adamant that paying attention to errors and making them explicit in the writing of our research accounts lends authenticity to our research and increases validity: "To see that errors, side-turnings, blind-alleys, uncertainty render the text more believable, not less; insofar as believability is a measure of authority, they lend authority."

LOOKING INTO YOUR EYES: ATTENTION

I turn now to consider the nature of looking into another's eyes in terms of attention. I explore *attention* in relation to the work of practical theologians Campbell (1986), Leach and Paterson, (2007; 2010), and action researcher Ramsey (2011, 2014). I conclude with Buber's (1958a, 1958b) elucidation of the nature of dialogue. My intention is to build a practice-theory in which looking-attention is fostered through opening communicative space.

I've already referred to Campbell's insights into paying attention to others through genuine listening in the helping relationship. He follows this with an emphasis on paying "...attention to others by *looking* at them" (1986, p. 103, italics original). In essence "To be present to others is to offer them the openness of our face, to catch but not to imprison, their eyes, and to allow ourselves to see them in all the vitality of their bodily expressiveness" (1986, pp. 103-104). What is striking about his insight into the pastoral relationship is its correlation to my inquiry into my practice of preaching the Bible. In what sense am I able to consider myself to have listened to my congregation as I speak if I do not drink in their presence through my own looking? My growing discovery that I was not aware of who was in the congregation except on the basis of who I saw before and after the service meant that I was not present to them nor they to me because I was unable to listen with my eyes. Looking into the eyes of my congregation demanded interior work on my part. Only as I was able to be fully present to myself would I be able to be present to others. Campbell's (1986, p. 108) call for pastoral care forms a call to me as a preacher: "Formation for pastoral care must therefore encourage people to pay attention to the 'inner life', in times of quiet reflection which give leave for light or dark to enter in."

This emphasis on the inner life as the fountainhead of effective pastoral care goes some way in teasing out one of the core discoveries of my research. Whereas my research began with a question about what goes on in the communication space between me and my congregation when I preach, I have been led by the process and discovered that it is not so much about *what* or *how* I preach, or even *what* or *how* my congregation hears the sermon. It is about the quality of the relations we share and the integrity of our spiritual formation. Consider if the discovery of my lack of eye contact was solely construed as an issue of effective communication to be solved through psychological analysis. What I am suggesting is that there is more at stake. Though there are psychological and perhaps social factors that are relevant to my analysis, my pastoral relationship as preacher with my congregation is defined within a nexus of spiritual disciplines. Looking into the eyes of the congregation demands interior work answered by their interior work and which meets in the 'middle' or the 'between' of our communicative relations.

The importance of the spiritual disciplines in direct relation to preaching is given attention by Lischer (1996). He cautions preachers who focus on form as the key to effectiveness. The secret of a good sermon does not reside in treating it as a commentary on the text, the indirect approach of inductive preaching, nor the sermon sold as a consumer product. Effective preaching is rooted in the community of faith, in "...the preacher [who] spends a lifetime sustaining a single narrative" (1996, p. 178) and focused on the eschatological nature of the good news. He insists that "...renewal will not begin with the sermon at all. It begins with those who make sermons" (1996, p. 179). His conviction that vital faith makes for transformative preaching is about more than the individual preacher however. "Where do sermons come from? They come from prayer, worship, and the daily witness of ordinary Christians. We will not fix preaching by tinkering with our sermons but by relearning the distinctive languages of the church's faith" (1996, pp. 179-180). Lischer's approach is problematic at the point at which he advises relearning. This suggests there are pristine languages that we somehow are able to unearth and recover. It is implied that there are voices from the past that were untainted by their context. This said, he offers an example of Luther preaching of the birth of Jesus contextually as if it had taken place in Lower Saxony (1996, p. 180). It appears to me that Lischer is inviting us to preach within the nexus of the whole tradition of Christian community without imagining that our time is the only era that counts. I

would argue that the message is incarnated in our own experience with others-Other thus participating in the incarnation of Jesus Christ of 1st century Palestine.

The metaphorical insight of nakedness which I gained in acknowledging that I did not look at the congregation (never mind looking into their eyes!) arose through relational dialogue. AR had caught hold of me and would not let me go. At times the quality of the communicative space was not occurring in a full and rounded way. I was hearing but not listening, seeing but not perceiving (cf. Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:14-15). Yet my continuing engagement with the AR process in concert with my practice of prayer created the inner space to become increasingly attentive to what was going on. My spiritual formation was a holistic process that grew out of attentional practices. Here I am resisting any notion that 'action research' is a secular notion and 'spiritual disciplines' are sacred. My theological starting point is that God is the creator of all that is and that there is nothing that exists that is not sacred.

The words 'attention' and 'supervision' as enacted and theorised by action researchers are given a distinct and yet overlapping treatment by Leach (2007). In *Pastoral Theology as Attention* she identifies this approach as an action-reflection method and in this there is resonance with action inquiry. With Paterson she has written a book that puts flesh on the bones of attention with particular reference to the supervision relationship (Leach & Paterson, 2010). As such *Pastoral Supervision* is a practical handbook and has the feel of a 'how-to' manual with specific exercises to be worked through at the end of each chapter. This does not detract from the fact that this practical approach is clearly developed from an engagement with the literature. The context for their consideration of attention is undoubtedly a formal pastoral supervision for the professional minister and reflects their ecclesiological understanding of ministry (Methodism and Anglicanism).

I want to consider Leach's paper in which she sets out the theoretical framework for the activity of pastoral supervision because she indentifies it as an action-reflection approach for spiritual discernment. Leach (2007, p. 23) defines 'Pastoral Theology as Attention':

> ...to engage the embodied senses that belong to the interpretation of living human documents as well as intellectual faculties, and to engage theological perspectives with the broad issues of cultural and political life and not just with the preoccupations of the religious.

The important feature of her delineation of attention is that it is holistic. It is a practical-theoretical approach to spirituality that enfolds the physical and sensory, the cultural and political, and resists giving priority to religious considerations. The attention she sets out is unabashedly "spiritual listening" (2007, p. 24). It arose out of a particular experience she had in ministry to a dying colleague and met a particular need that she perceived in her teaching (2007, pp. 23-24). This "spiritual listening" "...involves both a physical listening to the person in front of us and at the same time, a trusting that God is deeper than the deepest pain... Such listening is about waiting to be prompted to act by the Holy Spirit rather than rushing into action" (2007, p. 24). Leach's approach to attention seems to give priority to reflection over action rather than reflection in action.

There are five areas that form a cluster of considerations for attention within Pastoral Theology: attention to the voices; attention to the wider issues; attention to my own 'voice'; attention to theological tradition; attention to the mission of the Church. It is significant that Leach gives priority to the non-theological voices and issues before allowing them to enter the conversation. This is a deliberate move underpinned by Graham's (2002) treatment of theology as "...a performative discipline in which the task is to describe the ways in which the situation is already theology in practice, and a reflective discipline which has resulted in a body of situated texts" (Leach, 2007, p. 28).

My earlier commandeering of the song "Listen with your eyes and sing everything you see" was an assertion that listening is about far more than a function of the ears. Listening particularly involves not only what we hear with our ears but what we see with our eyes. Leach pushes against my assertion. "Metaphorically, the term 'voice' has much wider connotations...than an academic shorthand for a person's point of view" (2007, p. 25). Drawing upon Belenky *et al.* (1986) Leach (2007, p. 25) resists the metaphor of "voice" as in the sense of seeing/sight as this is suggestive of distancing: "Unlike seeing, speaking and listening suggest dialogue and interaction." Despite this emphasis on hearing, Leach goes on to write that, "...being attentive to the voices in a given situation means listening also to body language, to changes of mood and to feelings communicated in silences and glances and shifts in stance" (2007, p. 25). What I was suggesting in 'listen with your eyes' is not unlike that which Leach is advocating. Attention is alertness to the whole of

what is happening both internally and externally. It is seeing and hearing all the voices in dialogue.

Though there is much in Leach's approach that commends itself to me, it seems clear that it is somewhat constrained by its emphasis on the supervision of professional clergy as well as the way in which she frames the theological agenda. Much of this is to do with ecclesiological assumptions. The very question "What does the Christian tradition have to say?" is a mushrooming of further questions. The use of 'the' before Christian suggests that there is 'a' Christian tradition. Though Leach undoubtedly knows that Christianity is multifaceted, her use of 'the' introduces a problem into the question. Why? Because my concern is not to know "the" Christian tradition but 'my' Christian tradition (Dissenting) within the context of other Christians traditions and in relation to other religions and secular viewpoints. Equally problematic is the question framed around the mission of the Church. Mission is a term invested with meaning from our many and varied Church traditions. It carries the baggage of religious and cultural imperialism. Both questions presuppose attention to a world viewed through a set of theological lens. This endangers our attention to other religious and ideological perspectives.

The framing of the action-reflection approach to pastoral theology is that it is 'embodied'. Indeed, Leach (2010, pp. 115-116) relates how her own pastoral supervision "...has been helping her connect with what Rowan Williams means by the inhabitation of flesh by spirit in our own experience." She introduces an exercise 'Sculpting the Bible' as a way of helping ministers in their capacity as ministers attend to the clues held within their bodies as in the physical shaping of a biblical character they make connections with their own bodies. This being recognised, it is striking that the five questions or arenas for attention somehow fall short of the embodied agenda. It appears to emphasise intellectual analysis over practice. My question is whether pastoral theology as attention might begin more fruitfully with attention to the action.

Ramsey (2014, p. 6) sets out a careful argument for what she calls "a scholarship of practice centred on attention". Though her concern is with management of organisations, I think her consideration of attention as a focus for scholarly practice has implications for all practice based knowledge generation, and in particular my practice of preaching. Examining various sources in the literature, Ramsey delineates three strands for her practice-theory with its focus on attention.

First is an epistemology of practice which, through interaction with the world is generative of new knowledge. Second, Aristotle's virtue of *phronēsis* or practical wisdom which, she asserts needs a 'language of process'. This leads her towards Shotter's social poetics which is an interpretation of the later Wittgenstein. Practice orientated learning is characterised by the physical actions which in turn are generative and almost invariably arise spontaneously. Spontaneity occurs within a set of relations and "...is a social performance, created and recreated ephemerally, moment by moment" (2014, p. 9). The critical element running through each is "...a practice centred learning where new practice is privileged, rather than knowledge that is to be applied in practice" (2014, p. 7). Attention relates practice, ideas and context in a web. The slant Ramsey intends by her use of attention is that of mindfulness. Recognising two essential approaches to mindfulness - the Buddhist and western academic tradition - she aligns Wittgenstein to the latter. Shotter's development of Wittgenstein into "social poetics" emphasises that attending is a social, relational practice in which "... talk not only informs others but also strikes, moves, or gestures" (2014, p. 10). According to her, Wittgenstein and Winch "...point out, attention is a volitional, judgemental and selective act by which we attend to one aspect over others..." (2014, p. 10). Key to Ramsey's approach is that attention to the three domains of practice, ideas and relational context occurs in action. Commenting on the particular management learning project that forms the case study for her paper she gives shape to what this attention in practice means: "My sense making was emergent rather than analytical" (2014, p. 15). Crucially this kind of learning never arrives at completion. It is a continuous forward movement that demands new action inquiry.

Ramsey's construal of attention in which action-practice is the privileged domain in the process of generating ideas and which arises in a network of social relations, offers a rigorous pedagogy for embodied, physical learning in the moment. It is an intuitive, emergent scholarship that resists any kind of intellectualising application of ideas. She links her conceptualisation of 'idea' to Dewey's logic of inquiry: "...He argued that an idea was the 'anticipation of an outcome'" and that it remained mere "...suggestion until it had been subject to rigorous inquiry and evaluation" (2014, p. 15). Key to this process is the relational context in which we are making meaning through our actions. Sense making in action and in a set of contextual relations opens us up to new ways of acting and creating knowledge.

Ramsey's construal of mindfulness and attention contrasts with Leach in that it does not presuppose a set of questions to be asked. Instead, "Improvisational and mindful skills in attending to opportunities for new (learned) action will be at the core of a practice centred learning" (2014, p. 18). The physical, embodied nature is located in the action itself. Ideas themselves emerge out of the generative, spontaneous action-in-relations. This takes us firmly beyond Leach's approach which has a strong intellectual starting point and then seeks to unpack the embodied, sensual experience through particular psychological techniques.

Buber (1958a, pp. 160, 175) argues that the essence of dialogue is a turning towards the other and that this is its "basic movement". Dialogue demands that I be with myself in order to meet the other (1958a, p. 174). In true dialogue there can be no conflation of I-Thou. What is required is that I am true to who I am and desire to know the other for who they are. Dialogue is limited by our awareness of what he refers to as the "signs" which address themselves to us (1958a, p. 163). The signs are our experiences of the world, the things that happen. He suggests that all that is needed is "...to present ourselves and to perceive. But the risk is too dangerous for us, the soundless thunderings seem to threaten us with annihilation, and from generation to generation we perfect the defence apparatus" (1958a, p. 163). This armour is our conviction that these signs are not addressed to us in particular. Most of the time, we succeed in fending off the signs. However, "There are only moments which penetrate it and stir the soul to sensibility" (1958a, p. 163) The signs were there that I was not making eye contact with my congregation. My defences deflected the insights of Viviane and participants in the co-planning meeting. The risk of recognising my nakedness was something that felt too dangerous to allow into my consciousness. It was only in my faltering attempts in the dialogue that the moment of 'penetration' roused me to my senses.

Buber (1958b, p. 217) is convinced that creation and all creatures are in relation to each other and in these relations God makes himself known. The essential relation human beings have is as companions within the creation and that we are all in relation to the same centre (1958a, pp. 174-175). Although he is not explicit, it seems that this centre is God and that God becomes known to us through the dialogic of our relations in creation. Referring to humanity with what could well be a Pauline typology, he says that "...he [sic] has remained in Adam. Even now a real decision is made in him, whether he faces the speech of God articulated to him in things and

events - or escapes. And a creative glance towards his [sic] fellow-creature can at times suffice for response" (1958a, p. 193). My desire that the sermon would be facing the speech of God between the horizon of the scriptural world and the present world, calls for a creative glance towards my congregation. I find myself the naked preacher facing my fears of being exposed and cautiously lowering my guard and taking the risk to listen with my eyes.

The move to look my congregation in the eye arose out of a context of relations. The dialogical space created in Word Café was an action taken with others that was not merely a space in which ideas and theories might be exchanged. It was a physical activity in which we gathered in a space around tables and ate together. Physical proximity in our speaking, looking, and listening enabled us to explore the action of a particular experience of my preaching. Learning of my averted glance and exploring my reluctance to engage physically in this way with my congregation was profoundly embodied. I experienced the physical sensation of fear, the embarrassment of not being able to look, and of acting to look at my congregation at the beginning of worship. My learning was gut wrenching and thrilling in turns. It was learning that began in action, generating insight and ideas which I explored in the moment by moment of being in relationship in the context of a social grouping of people gathered as my congregation.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show how ART enabled me to gain insight into my practice and find ways to transform it. Looking the congregation in the eye continues to be a challenge. Being the naked preacher continues to evoke feelings of fear arising from my own vulnerability. Both the attentional practices of AR and of Ignatian spirituality are sources for framing and re-framing my enacted vision. These practices are embodied forms of spiritual attention in which I discern what to do next - in this moment - alive to all my senses set within the relational and dialogical context of my congregation. The focus on my practice of preaching the Bible is one aspect of the wider context of congregational life in which I seek with them to create communicative space. In a profound sense it has been PT which pushes beyond "...a discourse concerned with propositional or abstract understanding of divine nature and being..." (Graham, 2013b, p. 150). Steeped in an AR orientation this PT has been an embodying of "...a kind of dispositional understanding - an

attentiveness - directed towards facilitating deeper participation in the life and practices of God in the world" (2013b, p. 150).

Nurturing the practices of attentiveness in me and my congregation requires a further dimension of being aware of my positionality. Negotiating the insider-outsider territory profoundly requires attentional skills. In the following chapter I set out the issues involved in being a practitioner and researcher inhabiting varying degrees of insider-outsider position in relation to the inquiry. How is it possible for me to maintain integrity when my practice is the focus of the inquiry and I am both researcher and the one who is being researched?

CHAPTER 6

THE VISIBLE PREACHER:

FINDING A PLACE TO STAND BEFORE THE CONGREGATION

> Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.
> (Attributed to Martin Luther, Bainton, 1950, p. 185)

> The preacher still stood looking into the coals. He said slowly, "Yeah, I'm goin' with you. An' when your folks start out on the road I'm going' with them. An' where folks are on the road, I'm gonna be with them."
>
> "You're welcome," said Joad. "Ma always favored [sic] you. Said you was a preacher to trust" (Steinbeck, 1976, p. 73).

INTRODUCTION

I borrow Luther's declaration following his refusal to recant the body of his written work unless "convicted by Scripture and plain reason" in order to explore my positionality as preacher and researcher (Bainton, 1950, p. 185). The certainty of his theological stance starkly contrasts with the ever shifting enigma of ascertaining where I stand in relation to my congregation.

The second quotation is from another preacher who serves as a Christ figure in *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 1976). Jim Casy is trusted because he displays integrity in a rather unexpected way. He confronts his sexual behaviour as hypocrisy and ultimately loses his faith, concluding that there is no need for God or Jesus (1976, p. 28). He opts for the "Holy Sperit [sic]" being the same as the "human sperit [sic]" and in so doing chooses to go along Route 66 with the dispossessed of Oklahoma (1976, p. 31). He gets involved in organising workers to strike for better pay and conditions. The early sermons preached by Casy are superseded by his actions which lead to his brutal murder (1976, p. 495).

Both preachers express my search towards finding a place to stand before my congregation. At the outset of my ministry I understood that the task of the preacher was to stand before the congregation and declaim the Truth of the Gospel and apply it to people's lives. My formation as a pastor and preacher has led me to being with people on the road. My research into my practice of preaching with my congregation has involved finding a place to stand before the congregation *with* rather than *above* them. It is on this point that I have encountered incredulity at the idea that I would be researching my own practice of preaching with my congregation as co-researchers. How could I be objective in analysing my sermons and how they were heard? Was I not frightened that this process would open up a Pandora's box of

emotions as I was pummelled with criticism from congregants? Worse yet, how would I know that hearers would not shield me from their true opinions about my content, style and delivery? Was it possible to research in this way and come to the end of the project having made any valid discoveries?

These questions are not to be batted away blithely. They pertain to the overlapping issues of rigour, quality and validity. The 'involved' researcher poses an insurmountable problem for many in the traditional social sciences. The concerns put to me are rooted in what Coghlan (2013, p. 349) identifies as "...the notion that objective value must be somehow a concept that is 'out there'. Such a notion is based on the mistaken assumption that knowing is taking a look at something that is 'out there'." AR is an epistemological approach that holds the subjective-objective in creative tension. This is expressed forcefully by Freire (1970, p. 32): "Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship." Good research is not measured by distancing tactics in the pursuit of objectivity. Rather it is understood in terms of qualities that exist within communities of self-reflexive practice. These qualities involve embracing a variety of forms of knowing, being transparent about choice points, values, and purposes.

The implications of being an involved researcher whose practice was the focus of research were considerable. I took intellectual and emotional risks with my congregation to increase the richness of our experience and understanding. The principle personal quality required of me to engage in doing good research is the embodiment of authenticity. Coghlan (2013, p. 349) suggests that the 'fruit' of authenticity is the ability to "...realise that all things valuable are valued through responsible consciousness, and that true values are learned by people being responsible." The art of valuing "...integrates the intellectual, moral and affective dimensions" (2013, p. 349). The involved researcher who self-consciously aims for authentic practice is aware of the challenges posed by the questions and meets them head on.

It is one thing to strive for authenticity and quite another to actualise those qualities. The manner in which I moved between multiple roles as a researcher practising the skills of ART requires evaluation. In what follows I explore my insider-outsider positionality and demonstrate the process of reflexivity in my formation which encompassed moments of dissonance and resonance in terms of

acting with integrity. Throughout this chapter I explore different aspects of 'where I stand' in relation to the 'field' as a researcher in collaboration with my congregation. I do this through a theme generated through Word Café about my physical placement in the church space when I preached: on the dais or on the same level as the congregation. I explore insider-outsider positionality as a continuum stressing the importance of being visible, particularly in terms of power and knowledge.

WHERE DO I STAND?

I begin by telling the story of a cycle of learning that occurred through the Word Café. This particular action-reflection concerning where I stood to preach the sermon will serve as a metaphorical device through which I examine the question of positionality. I trace the development of my own location as a 'researcher' into my own practice reviewing material from a paper I wrote prior to the co-planning meetings. I will do this in terms of a critique by Wood and Altglas (2010, p. 23) via Bourdieu of what they depict as a wrongheaded conflation of the insider-outsider relation which results in "...the study of religion that was sociological in name only." I respond to their concerns by considering positionality through Tisdale's (1997) preacher as local theologian and Herr and Anderson's (2005) insider-outsider continuum as part of their wider discussion of research validity.

"We need to see the minister to be able to connect!"

My congregation worships in a modern complex erected in 1994. The architectural focal point of the church is a large cross shaped window embedded in the front wall. An ample dais juts out towards flexible seating. The chairs are arranged in different configurations depending on the event taking place. For the typical worship service the seating wraps around the dais in a semi-circular formation.

When I took up my responsibility as minister of this congregation the pulpit, lectern and communion table were sited on the dais. Within months of my arrival I experimented with moving the furniture to the ground level in which there was enough space between the dais and the seating to accommodate the furniture. This arrangement had been in place for some time before we began Word Café and this ordering remained throughout the process.

Even as I am describing the physical context in which my preaching took place it occurs to me that in making this change to the worship space I did not consult the congregation. I liaised with my Church Secretary (office bearer of the Church and my line manager) and judged that the people were quite adaptable. I concluded that this change did not require discussion and approval at a Church Meeting. I accepted that if there was a negative response then it would need to be discussed. This strikes me as not as a minor detail but an action throwing into sharp relief the power relations between the congregation and me. My position as minister of the congregation bolstered by the support of the principal elected office-bearer of the Church was enough for me to take and implement this decision. There was no reported adverse reaction of the congregation to the change and so the new layout became settled. Consequently, I conducted the whole service from the ground level standing in front of the communion table without any physical barrier between me and the congregation. Was this a legitimate exercise of power in a congregationally ordered Church?

The assumption I made was that by closing the physical distance between the congregation and the upfront activities of Bible reading, prayers, preaching, and communion there would be an increased sense of intimacy. In addition I considered that by preaching on the same level as the congregation I would counter being the preacher who is 'six feet above contradiction' (or in this case a more modest 40 cm). Though it would appear that my intention in reordering the furniture was to close what I perceived to be a communication gap, I based my decision on my suppositions about the effects that this change would have on immediacy and effectiveness in terms of both general worship and my preaching. The assumptions underpinning my decision to act without engaging in dialogue were later challenged by the conversations generated by Word Café.

What became evident was that the reordering of the furniture was not significant. In fact it was never mentioned. The primary issue that arose in the later stages of Word Café pertained to being visible to some of the participants. It first surfaced with a plea, "We need to see the minister to be able to connect" (12.06.2011, Table 4 WS 4). The following day I had a spontaneous conversation in the kitchen with a participant (PJ, 13.06.2011). They remarked on how they had enjoyed Word Café and added that it had been difficult to see me due to my short stature. Would it not be helpful if I preached from the platform? The participant

remarked that they found it hard to concentrate if they were unable to see me or had to spend time straining to look past the person sitting in front of them. This was not the first time that this individual had expressed this opinion and it chimed with another member of the congregation who had expressed similar sentiments.

> I expect there may be others. I need to seriously consider whether it is more important for me to be on the 'ground' and near people or slightly raised and more distant so that people can clearly see me. I'm very reluctant to move up and away because I prefer immediacy. However, the more this is articulated the more I wonder whether it [being on the same level as the congregation] is the best approach (PJ, 13.06.2011).

I recognised that the comment on the table cloth and the views expressed to me directly might have been representing a minority voice and so I needed to test it out both in the further Word Café sessions as well as the Church Meeting.

I decided to vary my practice and though the furniture remained in the same position on the ground floor, I moved onto the dais to preach. I consulted the Church Meeting (19.07.2011) concerning the move and asked for feedback. By the time the Word Café was held on the 24 July 2011, I had preached from the dais on several occasions which meant that most - if not all - participants had been able to experience the change of position.

Five comments regarding preaching from the dais were recorded across three of eight tables (R, 24.07.2011, Tables 2, 5, 6). Two comments indicated that preaching from the dais improved the experience as a hearer, improving concentration for at least one participant (R, 24.07.2011, Table 6, WS2; WS6). Another comment seems to indicate that it was better for me to be in "a pulpit" and yet goes on to express that even this does not eliminate the "difficulty if taller person are sitting in front [sic]" (R, 24.07.2011, Table 5, WS1). One participant was clear that if I were to preach from the "rostrum" then it was necessary for the seating to be moved forward (R, 24.07.2011, Table 2, WS1). This seems to indicate that physical proximity was important to this person in creating the kind of intimacy that I had been concerned about creating. A different voice pointed out that "We're all comfortable sitting in different places in church. Where are you most comfortable standing? You seem to be trying out different variations! Not sure you'll be able to please everyone wherever you stand" (R, 24.07.2011, Table 6, WS5). This participant does not articulate their own preference but identifies that the preacher as much as the congregation has to find a comfortable place to be. They highlight the

risk of being a practitioner who chases after the elusive goal of pleasing everyone. This comment probed at my motivation for changing my position. Was I trying to please the crowds or was I pursuing a place to stand that would improve the preaching experience for both the congregation and me? This participant identified that there is not a single style of communication that works universally.

In my own reflections both before and after watching the video of the service on the 24 July 2011, I recognised that the feedback indicated that whilst recognising that the dais worked well for a number of participants, I was insistent on minimising the physical gap between the congregation and me by moving the chairs closer to the platform. I expressed that this experimentation with position was part of "...a dynamic process" (PJ, 25.07.2011, pre-viewing the video). After viewing the service my reaction resonated with the participants: "Being on the dais definitely looked better - even in terms of the video. It lifted me above people enough so that they could see the whole of my body and the language I was communicating through my body actions" (PJ, 26.07.2011, post-viewing the video). The dialogical encounter that occurred through Word Café enabled me to listen to my congregation and to see myself too and through a self-reflexive process modify my practice.

Crucially, this cycle of learning was not an end in itself but remained open to further learning and new actions. In this cycle I committed to a particular action to stand on the dais to preach and to re-instate the furniture in such a way that I was able to maintain intimacy with the congregation. This involved creating enough space on the platform in front of the communion table to enabling me to have free movement to speak without any barriers between me and the congregation. This, combined with moving the seating towards the dais, minimised the physical gap. I expressed that "What is of vital importance to me is to establish intimacy whilst enabling all to be able to participate in the communication event" (R, 24.07.2011, p. 12).

FINDING A PLACE TO STAND AS A METAPHOR FOR POSITIONALITY

It is here that I flesh out further the arguments I have already made for being the involved researcher who is weaving in and out and between being an insider and outsider. Essential to being embedded as a researcher-practitioner is the development of critical self-reflexivity through the attentional practices of AR, theological reflection, and spiritual disciplines such as the Ignatian exercises. In

Chapter 1 I considered some of the interdisciplinary issues as 'blurry boundaries' (p. 24) and being 'caught between two worlds' (p. 28). In Chapter 2 I explored the possibility of ART and drew upon Coghlan's image of being 'perched on the boundaries'. Reader's 'blurred encounters' and Graham's cultivation of wisdom through discernment of the practices of the faith communities furnished me with a way to negotiate the borderlands between the disciplines. In Chapter 3 I considered my positionality with particular reference to the Quaker anthropologist Collins who makes an argument for going beyond the insider-outsider compartmentalisation. I set out my methodology and demonstrated the attentional practices that continuously served to challenge me to be explicit about my roles in the Word Café. In Chapters 4 and 5 I continued to analyse the dialogical encounter that occurred through the critical narratives of being a hearer and a preacher of the Bible.

At this juncture, I draw upon the dialogue surrounding my physical placement in the act of preaching in order to give focused attention to the insider-outsider spectrum. Setting out Wood and Altglas' (2010) vision of the nature of a scientific reflexivity I examine my early musings centring on the challenge of my positionality and that of my congregation and identify particular sources in the literature that aided my reflections. Then I give attention to two particular texts by Tisdale (1997) and Herr and Anderson (2005). These assisted the formation of what I would call my 'thoughtful practice'. The first falls within the field of homiletics and yet self-consciously engages with the social sciences as a source for the preacher's art. The second attends to the subtleties of positionality for the AR community and beyond. Finally, I draw out some strands from the narrative of finding a place to stand before my congregation.

A warning against collapsing insider-outsider relations

Wood and Altglas (2010) are critics of those who advocate an involved researcher in which the insider-outsider distinction is considered an unhelpful and outmoded way of thinking about inquiry. They point out the risk of the researcher becoming so entwined in the field that they end up collaborating with the 'insider' interpretation and thus simply reproduce self-understandings of the insider group. They argue that this kind of blurring occurs in the work of Guest and Collins (in Arweck & Stringer, 2002) in their treatment of the insider-outsider question. They judge Guest to have "reproduced" the subjective approaches to religion advocated by

Christian authors such as Tomlinson. They note that though Collins advocates the erasure of the insider-outsider distinction, at the same time he distinguishes himself from insiders with his "scientific practices". They indicate that in such an admission he inadvertently concedes the practices of one who is an 'outsider'. Contrary to Collins and Guest, they unashamedly argue for an "elitist" privileging of the social science researcher. They further their argument by turning their sights on Waterhouse (in Arweck & Stringer, 2002) who understands her relationship as researcher with educated insiders as one of complementarity; her outsider critique of Soka Gakkai was affirmed by well informed insiders (Wood & Altglas, 2010, pp. 17-20). Wood and Altglas (2010, p. 20) reject this notion of analytical resonance as, "...it could only be maintained upon the unrealistic premise that no power-relationship pertains between researchers and their field subjects." They conclude that the way in which Guest, Collins and Waterhouse have blurred the insider-outsider relation will lead in some measure to the researcher adopting "the discourses" of the insider(s) (2010, p. 20).

Taking Bourdieu (2010) as their starting point Wood and Altglas (2010, pp. 17-18) argue for "epistemic reflexivity" or "epistemic break". They interpret Bourdieu's conference address as indicating "...that the insider-outsider debate may be misleading - the relevant issue is whether or not knowledge is being produced *scientifically*" (Wood & Altglas, 2010, p. 17). In his address, Bourdieu affirms his view that it is possible "...for one to belong to the religious field and do scientific sociology of religion, but on condition of knowing this belonging and its effects, instead of concealing them, in the first place from oneself" (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 6). What is necessary is a "painful amputation" in which the researcher recognises and cuts off "adherences" (2010, p. 6). The refusal to make this painful break consigns the researcher to a "...double play that allows one to accumulate the profits of (apparent) scientificity and of religiosity" (2010, p. 6). What Bourdieu contends is that "The sociology of sociologists...aims at rendering visible some of the most powerful social obstacles to scientific production" (2010, p. 6). Wood and Altglas conclude that the scientific practices of researchers who are being scrutinised by other social scientific researchers sets them apart from their subjects (Wood & Altglas, 2010, pp. 18-19). This avoids the conflation of the researcher with those in the field.

My own methodological orientation is closely aligned with Guest, Collins and Waterhouse (in Arweck & Stringer, 2002) in viewing the insider-outsider relationship as being ambiguous. This is predicated on faith in the human capacity for self-reflection, problem solving and community building. The elitist vision of the sociologist of religion militates against the democratic impulses of the AR orientation and my own congregational ecclesiology. Yet the critique of Wood and Altglas via Bourdieu is important in alerting the participant researcher to the danger that exists in allowing our analysis to be distorted if we do not submit the research process to sustained interrogation.

With this warning ringing in my ears, I proceed to write the narrative of my own struggle with the insider-outsider concept and the way in which my practice and thought was stimulated by Tisdale (1997) and Herr and Anderson (2005). In the latter source I identify in the "continuum of positionality" the possibility of rigour whilst avoiding a sharp distinction between the professional social scientist and the insider to the field.

Wrestling with my place as an insider

I wrestled with the question of where I stood as one researching my own practice in the early stages of my process. In a paper prepared for a conference ("Methodological challenges in doctoral research on religion") in the lead up to the co-planning meetings in May 2010 (Boyd, 2013, pp. 101-102), I articulated similar questions to those with which I began this chapter:

> One of the central challenges of my research is my place within the research project...is it possible for me to be both the researcher and the researched and maintain rigorous quality of question-posing and testing of practices? What will prevent me from manipulating my congregation into giving me the kind of responses that I am looking for?

I searched for voices in the literature that would help me to navigate through the complexities of being an involved researcher. Three key sources in AR literature enabled me to conceptualise how I would occupy the insider-outsider position of researching my practice in my community of practice.

First, I identified the subjective-objective vantage point of the researcher who is implicated in action-reflection. In Coghlan's (2008a, p. 356) analysis of Lonergan, the subjective agent is aware of others with their subjective viewpoints and that it is this awareness of self and others that constitutes the objective world. Second, Heron

and Reason (2006) sketch the contours of cooperative inquiry which is research that is *with* others rather than *on* or *for* others. It is grounded in an "extended epistemology" in which there are different ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional, practical (2006, p. 149). They address head on the criticism "...that people can fool themselves..." when inquiring into their own experiences (2006, p. 149). They acknowledge that this is indeed a danger but are equally confident in the ability of human beings to develop the capacity for self-reflexivity. They term this "critical subjectivity" which "...means that we don't have to throw away our personal, living knowledge in the search for objectivity, but are able to build on it and develop it" (2006, p. 149). Crucially this kind of critical subjectivity occurs in collaboration with others who are practising the same. The third source was Bell and the way she infuses race into AR as a means of enacting justice. She highlights Black [sic] researchers whose research is sympathetic to an AR orientation. In particular she highlights Kenneth Clark's *Dark Ghetto* (1965) and the way in which he conceived of himself as an "'involved researcher'" who "...straddled two worlds: that of the researcher and that of the Black man" (2006, p. 53). Bell advocates for a committed form of AR which seeks to change the social structures that keep inequalities in place. The significance of Bell to my own research interest was as a stimulus for me to be aware of my own positioning, particularly as a white male engaging in a form of communication (preaching) which potentially reinforces passivity in the congregation. I preach to a congregation that has as part of its constituency those who are non-white and which has a female majority. Bell's analysis raised my consciousness as a practitioner-researcher against reification of the *status quo* through awareness of my positionality.

As I prepared myself for collaborative action with my congregation I grappled with the complexity of my position as a researcher and a member of the faith community.

> In the research community of a local Church congregation, I am an 'outsider' in that I have only been a member for a year. I am an 'outsider' because I am only expected to be in the congregation for a period of time, which could be as short or long as I and the Church Meeting sense 'the call of God' for me to be minister of this Church. I am a transient member. I am 'insider' in that I have been called to serve this Church as preacher, teacher, pastor, and leader of the Church. My calling means that I have been admitted to the heart of community life (Boyd, 2013, p. 107).

There was a further aspect to this. I was an 'insider' in terms of being a post-graduate researcher. I had 'insider' knowledge about the nature of AR combined with my theological training. Conversely the congregation were 'outsiders' to AR and would more than likely defer to my theological expertise. This is evident in the discussion in Chapter 7 (p. 199) in the section 'Power isn't the right word'.

I went on to complexify my positionality in relation to the congregation's experience of being insiders-outsiders. I considered the varying degrees of belonging. Those who had experienced decades within the Church were 'insiders' in terms of being bearers of the history and traditions of the congregation. Membership too is a type of 'insider' status as this is required for participating in the Church Meeting. Some members may be more 'insider' than others because they have served as office bearers even though they are not the longest standing members (2013, pp. 107-108). Later, following the first Word Café, I reflected on the positionality of those who were not members of the congregation (adherents):

> ...there are numbers of people who, though they regularly attend, participate fully in church activities and give to the church regularly, they choose not to become a 'member' in the sense outlined by the constitution of the church. Yet for all intents and purposes they do not look any different from anyone else in the church (PJ, 24.11.2010).

The distinction between members and adherents is not evident in congregational activities except in terms of participation in the Church Meeting and fulfilling roles in the Church that require a person to be a member. In relation to Word Café, participants self-selected and it was open to all who had participated in the worship on a Word Café Sunday whether members, adherents, or visitors.

What I was grappling with was that by virtue of my position as the minister of the Church I was profoundly an 'insider'. Yet I was an 'outsider' in terms of being new to the congregation and the community of Witney. As a researcher into my own practice I was enmeshed as an 'insider' to my own actions and in no way could claim to fulfil the criteria of being an 'outsider' in the sense of being an objective observer of my preaching. I had only begun to scratch the surface of the issues I faced. However preliminary my reflections on my positionality and all the uncertainties about how I would negotiate my position of power as an insider, I made a commitment to work with the congregation to build the trust that is necessary for dialogue. "As we engage in the face to face dialogue and learn to trust one another with the truth of our perspective we will have achieved the primary aim of the

research: to make the preaching event a communal event in which all participate as listeners and speakers" (Boyd, 2013, pp. 112-113).

What was becoming apparent to me was that the insider-outsider designation refused crisp delineation. It appeared to me that in any given moment we are insiders and outsiders simultaneously. In terms of being a researcher, being an outsider required an impossible ideal of distance and, it seemed to me, if a person were able to achieve it they would have to cease being. It is of the very nature of our existence that we are insiders because our day to day life is one of immediacy. We are inextricably bound up in an encounter with other people, with things and with our wider environment. The only way to be outsiders in the sense of critical understanding of what is happening around us is for us to be profoundly insiders to our own self in relation to others.

Tisdale and the preacher as a folk artist

During the journey towards Word Café I encountered the homiletic contribution of Tisdale (1997). She casts the role of the preacher as local theologian according to cultural categories and directly addresses the question of positionality. Writing from within an American context, she proposes the preacher as ethnographer who exegetes her congregation. She reflects on how this entails navigating through the insider-outsider tension. Tisdale indicates that the insider understands their context and expresses it in narrative forms comprehensible to other insiders. This contrasts with the outsider who is able to bring universal cultural "categories and frameworks beyond the local culture" (1997, p. 52). She conjures up the image of the preacher who "straddles the abyss" between being a part of the congregation (insider) and yet speaking the truth of what she calls "a larger Gospel vision" (outsider) (1997, p. 53). Tisdale (1997, p. 55) is keen to emphasise that "local theology" is not divorced from "...greater faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures." She seems to suggest that the preacher's task is to be involved in the particularities of the congregation(s) and yet somehow give voice to a universal "Gospel vision" and through such an encounter gives shape to a local form of the gospel (1997, p. 53).

It is interesting that Tisdale chooses to capitalise "Gospel vision" whilst all other uses are lower case. Her use of Tillich and Calvin indicate that her understanding of "Gospel vision" exists beyond us. Referring to Tillich she asserts

that it is that the job of the preacher to facilitate the apprehension of the Gospel by removing "false stumbling blocks" (1997, pp. 34-35). She goes on to identify in Calvin's work his use of the word "accommodation" as indicative of the nature of revelation itself. It is "...part of God's gracious divine action through which God takes the initiative and rhetorically bridges - through word and deed - the great gulf that exists between human beings and God" (1997, pp. 35-36). She indicates that neo-orthodoxy has overlooked the necessity of revelation being made known to human beings in "...mediated form. In revelation spiritual and physical, divine and human, are always yoked" (1997, p. 36). It would seem that Tisdale's vision of an authentic local theology or gospel is one of incarnated revelation of the universal "Gospel vision".

The preacher as local theologian does not act as a "Lone Ranger" but forms her theology in community: after all "...the true 'resident theologian' is deemed to be the congregation itself" (1997, p. 53). The congregation requires the preacher as a local theologian to fulfil the role of an insider-outsider. The preacher fulfils the roles of a skilled prophet, poet and professional theologian working with individuals with those same identified expertises in the congregation(s). Additionally, the preacher will only succeed in her task if she acquires the tools to become an ethnographer who exegetes her congregation. Congregational exegesis requires the study of the "seven symbols" readily accessible to most pastors: stories and interviews; archival documents; demographics; architectural and visual arts; rituals; events and activities; people (1997, pp. 64-77).

Tisdale's treatment of the insider-outsider positionality of the preacher in relation to the congregation describing it as an abyss to be straddled is telling. Her vision of preaching being "local theology" and "folk art" stretches towards a collaboration between the preacher and the congregation. In an effort to demonstrate how preaching mirrors the way in which revelation is mediated in human experience and bodily form, the idea of a universal "Gospel vision" combined with the idea of an ethnographer exegeting the congregation suggests she is still invested in a modernist, positivist approach. She explicitly states that the role of the preacher-ethnographer is to act as "participant-observer" in the "field": "As insiders, preachers are able to become fully immersed in the life of the congregation they are studying; as outsiders they are also able to keep some analytical distance from it" (1997, p. 60). I wonder what it is that qualifies the preacher to possess greater

analytic skills than those within the congregation. After all, it is quite conceivable (and often occurs) that people join congregations long after the preacher has joined the community. Does this not qualify the new comer to have greater outsider perspective than the long serving preacher? Tisdale (1997, p. 61) delineates what it is that sets a preacher-as-ethnographer-exegete apart from members of congregations: it is their expertise as professional theologian and proficient reader of cultural symbols. What is evident to me is that Tisdale's discussion of insider-outsider offers insight into the complexity of insider-outsider positionality. However, it is limited by construing the preacher as having the upper hand in the process of exegeting the congregation and arbitrating a transcendent "Gospel vision".

Tisdale proposes a way of managing the tension of preacher as insider-outsider with the image of "folk art" (1997, pp. 122-144). This is not the fine arts but the art of the people. She conjures a metaphor of preaching as a dance and in this way opens up a fresh vista. The intractable tension between Gospel and gospel, local and universal, insider and outsider, professional theologian and the congregation as resident theologian has the potential to find its own movement. She portrays the "preacher as folk dancer". I would want to go further and expand her image to conceive of the congregation as folk dancers. I would adapt this image of dance for ART. If the preacher is a folk dancer *with* her folk dancing congregation, then it is possible that the preacher and the congregation take turns in leading and following. It opens up in the possibility of ART as a dance in which there are no clear cut insiders and outsiders but an artful movement between the differing positions.

Herr and Anderson's complexification of the researcher's place

During my apprenticeship with David Adams as he facilitated the first Word Café, we discussed the complexities of my position as a researcher inquiring into my own practice with my congregation as co-researchers. He pointed me in the direction of Herr and Anderson (2005) and their continuum of the researcher as insider-outsider. This nuanced analysis stresses the importance of researchers being aware of their positionality not as a fixed state but a fluid ongoing negotiation in the inquiry process. They are emphatic that though it is crucial for the researcher to understand their place "...it is often no simple matter to define one's position" (2005, p. 32). In offering their analysis they are keen to resist any perception of rigid, clear cut classifications. For them, "...one's positionality doesn't fall out in neat categories

and might even shift during the study" 2005, p. 32). It is attending to this variability that is the key task of action researchers (cf. Humphrey, 2007, p. 23). They offer a robust approach to self-reflexivity which does not demand the self-confessed scientific elitism of Wood and Altglas.

There are six markers on their proposed continuum with a 'false' positionality tucked into the first. The first is of the insider researching their own practice with the aim of improvement. Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 31) insert into this category a deceptive approach of the 'outsider within' because it masks as an insider position. This describes a researcher who researches their own "site" acting as an outsider without acknowledging their insider status. The second position on the scale is of an insider collaborating with insiders to inquire into practice. The third is of insider(s) collaborating with outsider(s). The fourth extends the third position with teams of insiders and outsiders working in "reciprocal collaboration". The fifth positionality is of outsider(s) with insider(s) that is characterised for example by the outsider acting as a consultant for the insider. The sixth positionality tends to characterise the traditional social sciences, that of the outsider(s) observing the insider(s). In this final category, Herr and Anderson give examples of researchers who have examined the insights of the write ups of other AR projects. This is a form of outsider research "...on action research methods and epistemology" (2005, p. 43).

Even though positionality is extremely difficult to pin down, it is critically important for the researcher(s) to be involved in continuous assessment of the issues that affect the quality of inquiry. Herr and Anderson (2005, pp. 43-44) identify several strands of awareness that will aid those involved in the inquiry in their criticality. The first is to know our relation to the "field" as insider(s)/outsider(s). The second is to discern "Hierarchical position or level of informal power..." that exists within the web of relations in an organisation. The third is to be aware of social positioning, particularly with regard to gender, race, sexuality, and so on. The fourth is to be aware of historical differentials inherited from the days of empire and colonisation. This set of considerations complexifies positionality in terms of power relations.

Herr and Anderson do not advocate a particular positionality as an ideal. Rather they offer the schema to enhance researcher self-awareness in choosing their approach. However, in the spirit of transparency they do express their preference for the fourth position as offering the greatest potential for realising the democratic ideal

of AR. Nonetheless, they stress "...that knowledge production from all positions is valid as long as one is honest and reflective about one's multiple positionalities" (2005, p. 48). Intentional nurturing of this kind of self-reflexivity is core to what it is to be an action researcher and central to ensuring the quality of an inquiry (cf. Reason & Bradbury, 2008b, p. 6). In essence, the quality of the research is utterly dependent on the authenticity of the researcher in knowing who they are in relation to the Other.

Having established their contention that the bedrock of a quality inquiry is the self-aware researcher, Herr and Anderson (2005, pp. 54-57) go on to set out five criteria for validity matched with "goals of action research". Noting overlaps and yet contrasting their approach with Reason and Bradbury's validity choice points (see p. 26), they admit that their criteria were developed with a leaning towards the insider positionality (2005, p. 58). In doing so it is evident that each of the criteria depends on the researcher who is aware of their multiple positionalities and is prepared to interrogate themselves continuously. The first is "outcome validity" characterised by "action-orientated outcomes". This is the process whereby an inquiry leads to action and that action invites a new set of questions and so continues the forward moving spiral. "Rigorous action research...forces the researcher to reframe the problem in a more complex way..." (2005, p. 55). Second, there is "process validity" which encompasses the process of moving through numerous cycles of inquiry, deciding "what counts as evidence to sustain assertions" (2005, p. 55), and ensuring that methods enhance and encourage quality of relationships with participants. The process is enriched through multiperspectival stances achieved through triangulation. "Democratic validity" is the third indicator of the extent to which action inquiry is collaborative, driven by the needs and concerns of the local people in their own context. Herr and Anderson assert that the distinguishing feature of this aspect is that inclusion is not merely about gaining multiple perspectives (as in the process) but is of its essence to do with ethics and "social justice" (2005, p. 56). The fourth measure is "catalytic validity" which refers to the transformative impact that the action inquiry has on both the researcher and participants. A core practice is the self-reflexive discipline of "...keeping a research journal in which action researchers can monitor their own change process and consequent changes in the dynamics of the setting" (2005, pp. 56-57). The final criterion is "dialogic validity" which is pegged in professional terms as various forms of peer review and conversations with other

action researchers. It is clear that the dialogic aspect is conceived of as the outside perspective of those with expertise that will provide a critique of the researcher's data collection and interpretation. They do acknowledge the voices in action research that insist that for it to be authentic it must be collaborative.

Recognising that "...these validity criteria for action research are tentative and in flux" (2005, p. 57), I would argue for an extension of their proposal for dialogic validity. It encompasses a set of conversation partners: researchers, participants, critical friends as well as those outside professionals providing the scrutiny of a different vantage point. The epistemic break that Wood and Altglas call for is not necessary. However, it is essential that the researcher sets up a process that invites critical scrutiny not only from insiders but from outsiders. Surrounding ourselves with a variety of critical friends, particularly those who have knowledge and skill sets that are relevant to our research, will lower the risk of the researcher being carried away by their own ego or by the pressures of the insider group to adopt their narrative (2005, pp. 60-61).

The thread that runs through the continuum of positionalities and criteria is self-reflexivity: being visible to oneself and to others. It is looking into my own heart and mind and into the eyes of my congregation. It involves the action of going 'upstream' to notice what was happening in terms of my emotions, motives, thoughts and behaviours in order to be able to move 'downstream' in a new way of feeling, thinking and behaving in the moment. Critically, the insights I have gained into my own practice would not have occurred if I had not chosen to loosen a grip on my control and power of the preaching moment and enter into a dialogue with my congregation.

THE VISIBLE PREACHER AND RESEARCHER

The complexities of the insider-outsider relationship to my research context evokes memories of my experiences on the Ayrshire coast (cf. Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 258). For ten years I lived fifteen miles inland from Ayr shore. It was often a place of retreat on a day off. Even now, when I visit, it is certain that I will go down to the sea. I am a prairie boy and it may be that this has contributed to my fascination for the smell of salt and the feel of wind whipping around me with the sea vacillating between pounding waves and gentle lapping. The relationship of moon and earth brings the tide in and sends it out. The waterline varies. Sometimes it is a

long trek towards the jagged peaks of Arran. At other moments its breakers smash against the sea wall. Being an insider-outsider compares with that movement in which sea and sand intermingle and yet are never one and the same. Knowing the tidal rhythms is vital to sailing and safety.

This image is suggestive of the liminality of my position as insider-outsider. Herr and Anderson's continuum offers us ways of thinking about the ever changing nature of our positionality as researchers. It is being aware of the interplay. It requires a development of skills to ascertain whether we are on shore, out at sea, or paddling at the waters edge.

So how did the change in my physical position as preacher resonate with the varying positionalities that I experienced as practitioner-researcher? A theme that emerged from the dialogical cycles of action and reflection of the Word Café was the expressed desire for me to be visible to my congregation. This led me to change the place where I stood when I preached. At least for some participants, preaching from the ground level obscured me from view and inhibited them from "being able to connect" with me (12.06.2011, Table 4 WS 4). Being visible was essential to the effectiveness of communication for those participants who raised this as an issue. In tension with this was my own sense of being able to connect through being nearer to the congregation. Being on the dais and raised above those to whom I was speaking together with the increased distance between me and the congregation created a communication gap from my perspective. This required mitigation. In the dialogue the concern to connect visually was a mutual aim and yet in deciding a course of action it had to mediate between our contrasting vantage points. Being on the dais and moving the seating forward went some way towards addressing both perspectives in the pursuit of improving the connection in the moment of communication. My position as a preacher in relation to the congregation focussed on me being visible. It is this context-specific theme of *visibility* which suggests itself to me as a metaphor for considering the complexities of positionality.

Being 'visible' as a preacher and researcher in collaboration with my congregation is about being transparent about where I stand. Add to this the importance of making visible the varying positions of participants. It was only through cycles of action and reflection that we became 'visible' to one another. Key to becoming visible is the cultivation of self-reflexive practices within communities of practice.

Being 'visible' goes beyond Tisdale's preacher straddling the abyss of being an insider-outsider. Her preacher as ethnographer and folk dancer orientates the preacher to practices of listening and being attentive to the congregation. Yet she achieves something similar to the epistemic break that Wood and Altglas advocate by locating the preacher as the one who is somehow entrusted with the "Gospel vision" and the privilege of being an outsider to the local context. Her approach tends towards the preacher as the expert in biblical studies, theology and more informally as an ethnographer. Thus her vision of the preacher as local theologian bears the marks of elitism. Nonetheless, Tisdale recognises that we are insiders-outsiders simultaneously and our insider-outsider positioning may be to a greater or lesser degree in one direction or another.

With reference to Herr and Anderson's continuum of positionality, my research ranged between positions 1-3. The various methods used during the research process were intended to triangulate the cycles of research and data generation, similarly testing the insights and themes arising from the research from a variety of angles. As I consider how the research moved across the first three positionalities on the spectrum it will evidence the multiperspectival methods employed.

In terms of the first positionality, it was insider research insofar as I was an insider to the practice of preaching. I acknowledged my insider status from the outset avoiding the false positionality of "outsider within". I scrutinised my own practice of preaching through my process journal along with viewing the recording of my preaching within the whole act of worship. An important part of my self-reflexivity was engaging in the spiritual discipline of prayer and meeting my spiritual director once every four to six weeks.

My positionality extended towards the second marker of an "insider collaborating with other insiders". Here 'insider' refers to the experience of preaching, both for the preacher and the hearer. Though I am an insider to the practice of preaching I was not engaging in an inquiry with other insiders to this practice (though there were two participants who engage in regular preaching). The sense of 'insider' relates to the preaching event itself encompassing the action of preaching a sermon and that of a congregation hearing it. As a practitioner of preaching I joined with the participants in the co-planning meetings and the Word Café to inquire into our experience of preaching. I was seeking to gain insight into

how effectively I was communicating and to discover how I could improve my practice, not only through the activities of position 1, but in experiencing the insights of participants as a type of mirror to help me see things from their point of view. For participants, they were able to articulate their perceptions and understandings of what was happening in the sermon event as individuals as well as gaining insight into other people's experiences and insights. During co-planning meetings and in the Word Café plenary sessions participants had the opportunity to inquire into my actions and thought processes in preparing and preaching sermons. Through the cycles of action and reflection changes occurred.

The third point on the continuum of "insider(s) in collaboration with outsider(s)" encompasses those first two markers and opened up the research process to outside critique. As an insider inquiry into my own practice of preaching and as an insider with other insiders to the experience of the preaching event, a web of outsiders served different roles. A crucial aspect of my doctoral work was the supervision team with Elaine Graham and Wayne Morris. Monthly reports and meetings ensured that my methodology was being examined carefully. The scrutiny of my proposal for behaving ethically by the university ethics committee was another essential outsider in the process of the research design. This provided assurance that my research design kept people informed and safe. Further outsider reference points included David Adams who acted as a critical friend and mentor in the implementation of Word Café, schooling me in the AR orientation. I was accountable to the Bible Society through David Spriggs. I widened the net to include critical feedback in terms of ecclesiological practice. I approached three Congregational colleagues, Graham Adams, Richard Cleaves, and Janet Wootton. The more *ad hoc* outsider contributions came from academic conference participants. In contributing papers in various contexts consisting of audiences with a wide variety of expertises and insights, I put my research practices and emerging ideas to the test. Presenting aspects of the research and receiving critical feedback ensured that my feet were held to the fire in terms of methodological rigour.

A central issue that has to be made visible is that of power. In my final chapter I show how the research process engaged with the issue of power and wisdom and how I responded to the dialogical process. But for now, I want to foreground the nature of my own power in the research process. As I have already indicated I was profoundly insider and outsider as a newly appointed minister to my

congregation. I held the Church keys both physically and symbolically and in this way had access not only to every part of the building but to all documents and to the governing bodies of the Church. Add to this the privilege of being able to enter the homes of 'strangers' who were now my pastoral responsibility. My appointment to the Church was bound up with the knowledge that I was going to be acting as a researcher too. Earlier I noticed how I exercised my power as minister to re-order the Church without consulting the Church Meeting (extraordinary on reflection!). This is an instance of a power that came of my position and I chose to exercise it, calculating that it was not a matter for the Church Meeting.

It occurs to me that being able to use the 'keys' effectively had to do with the power of personality. Navigating the pastoral relationship and moving from 'stranger' to 'friend' as well as making decisions and implementing them without stirring up resistance is made easier by possessing good people skills. Not every Church leader finds negotiating this power of holding and utilising the keys equally easy. Charisma is a character trait that assists in the exercise of power for good or for ill.

Returning to Herr and Anderson's four areas of awareness, I would analyse my position of power as being primarily of the "hierarchical" and "informal" type combined with my social positioning (male, white, heterosexual, educated etc...). My power consisted of having already undertaken a pilot project with my previous congregation and having spent four years exploring my research question and interest. It would be fair to say that I held the research question and had acquired a growing awareness and understanding of the practices of AR and the pastoral cycles of PT. This was the power of knowledge.

There is another aspect of power to be made visible. As a preacher I have the power that comes of being articulate. I call this the power of speech. I am a dominant personality and this, combined with being able to articulate my ideas in a forceful manner, carries the potential of silencing others and shutting down dialogue. Delivering a sermon every week in which, due to our tradition, the congregation expect a twenty to twenty five minute sermon, affords me a platform for using speech to communicate my ideas about a Bible passage(s). Our tradition of preaching does not have inscribed into it a way for the congregation to respond.

Though I set out to collaborate with my congregation, it is important to acknowledge that I exercised the power of invitation. If I had not initiated the move

to opening communicative space through the Word Café, the opportunities for dialogical space for the congregation to offer their insights and challenges would not have come into being. I was not compelled by my congregation to engage in this conversation. I was not obligated from within the tradition, nor was there insistence from the congregation nor was there a recommendation to do so from the wider fellowship of Congregational Churches. It was my own choice to engage in academic study. It was my response to what I was learning which inspired me to explore the question of what happens when I preach a sermon.

In response to my exercise of power to invite the congregation to engage with my question, the Church Meeting exercised its power by agreeing to participate. It is important to note that when they called me as minister they had done so with knowledge that academic research would form a significant part of my ministry. I am making visible the way in which I, both as preacher and minister, hold the power to engage in dialogue or not, though constitutionally, the Church Meeting could hold me to account and require me to hear what they have to say. The point is that even within a congregationally ordered Church, a lot of power is invested in the minister in terms of social setting. This closely relates to Herr and Anderson's designation of a "level of informal power" and social positioning.

These self-critical comments jar against mainstream academic writing. Making visible my trait as a dominant character together with putting into plain view the power existing between me and the congregation could call into question my competence as a researcher, particularly if dispassionate objectivity is perceived as the measure of validity in research. This level of personal visibility does not sit easily with approaches to the social sciences which require researchers to be unbiased. It could be judged that I failed as a researcher because I have exposed my own interests thus showing how deeply implicated I am in my 'field' of inquiry. Critics might suggest that I have not succeeded in rising above the research site and that therefore my findings are distorted by narcissism and being bound too closely to participants.

Possible critics of my methodology might be Wood and Altglas. Their argument for an "epistemic" break in order to achieve disentanglement from the social presuppositions assumed in the field indicates they would not be at ease with what they might consider to be my conflation of the insider-outsider question. Their argument for this epistemic break "...enables much that is hidden about social life

(due to the *illusio*) to be revealed..." avoiding the sociologist merely parroting the "pronouncements of those they study" (2010, p. 18). I would counter this with the argument that I have been making throughout this thesis: being written onto the page and acknowledging my 'biases' and the limitations of my practice as a researcher, makes visible to me, to the congregation, to my critical friends, and to the reader the way in which learning has taken place and what yet needs to be done. Essential to action inquiry and, I would argue, to PT is that learning is not about arriving at a destination. Rather, it is assessing the nature of our insights, testing them in action, and evaluating them to discover further learning leading to action. If the narrative of the research is to be authentic it has to resist the tendency to provide a neat version of events and instead make visible the untidiness of inquiring into human practices.

Being visible in my role as preacher and researcher involves continuous action-reflection in dialogue with participants. By keeping power and knowledge out in the open and under discussion, it brings about the possibility for mutual assessment of the complexity of power relations between participants and researchers. In the context of PAR, Grant *et al.* (2008, p. 593) point out the inherent danger of assuming that the commitment to democratic impulses annuls power differentials.

> "...Power inequities within the research relationship are not erased, only reduced through processes of PAR... Without identifying and discussing power issues within the research relationship...and power dynamics within the researcher's setting, non-reflexive claims to equality of power may result. This can lead to oppressive relationships...."

Exposing power relations is achieved through "researcher reflexivity" and "open discussion with communities, examining sources of power, especially those that are less apparent, acknowledging power differentials and encouraging discussion about how to address them" (2008, p. 593). I would argue that this intentional analysis of the nexus of power mitigates tendencies towards abuses of power and is necessary for all forms of action research and practical theology, including ART.

POWER AND KNOWLEDGE IN UNDERSTANDING POSITIONALITY

Making power relations visible demands consideration of the intertwining of power and knowledge in shaping the positionality of the researchers and participants. In considering my own positionality I have already explored to some extent the power relations and knowledge exchanges that existed for me as a preacher and

researcher with my congregation. Before pressing on to my final chapter in which I explore the themes of power and wisdom, silence after the word, and the role of affections which were generated through the co-planning meetings and Word Café, I give a brief overview of current thinking in action research, theology and practical theology on the concepts of power and knowledge.

There is considerable overlap in sources and perspectives between AR and theology. Action researchers, Gaventa and Cornwall (2008, p. 172), spell out their conviction that "Power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined." Graham (2009, p. 239, italics original) examines concrete instances of public theology fulfilling the "...aim to align itself with principles of empowerment and participation..." of the marginalised and in so doing recognises that "knowledge *is* power." It is striking that in Sykes' (2006, p. 101) theological treatment of power, the theme of knowledge is almost absent except for a fleeting reference to the role of knowledge in the social relations of power. I contend that such silence in naming knowledge as cohering with power is a significant omission, offering a partial vision of the nature and practice of power.

Let us behold the rich tapestry of perspectives on power. Sykes accepts Lukes' (1974) assessment that the debate centred on the nature of power is far from settled. He firmly expresses the view that the matter should never be resolved. Rather it is essential to sustain a scrutiny of power by persisting with Lukes' question: "'What interests us when we are interested in power?'" (in 2006, p. 7). Sykes borrows Lukes' "'thin'" definition of power as a framework for his analysis of the topic in theology: "...power always involves the ability to make a difference in the world" (2006, p. 12). A "thick" definition of power is situated in historical context throwing up a kaleidoscopic array of understandings. Lest the suggestion of making "a difference in the world" is taken to imply an action orientation, it becomes plain that this is not the direction developed by Sykes. Instead, power is considered exclusively in terms of God and the Church: the power of God, the power of the Church in society, and the existence and use of power within Church structures and relationships.

I have already indicated that in this wide ranging and at times diffuse survey of power (cf. Bailey, 2008, p. 148; Collinge, 2007, p. 127), Sykes does not give attention to knowledge as an aspect of power in the Church and in wider Christian theological discourse and practice. Graham (2009, p. 224) brings out the

implications of such an omission: "It is the issue of power in the very shaping of theological discourse itself: questions of whose voices, whose perspectives are incorporated into theology; and by implication, whose voices and experiences are absent." Consider the questions that Sykes (2006, p. 149) poses near the end of his critique:

> Why then be bothered with orders, offices and titles? Why not sweep the whole lot into the bin of history, throw the mitres (which are symbolic crowns made of cloth) into the Thames, and generally take the Magnificat literally for a change?

His pragmatic response to notions of power in the Church is to assert that it is preferable to know who has power by their status and dress code than for 'egalitarian' forms of Church where power is usurped and exercised under a cloak of invisibility. He bases his caution "before rushing to embrace egalitarianism" on the sociological insights of Harrison (1959, pp. 149-150) into American Baptists in the mid-twentieth century. Though Sykes (2006, p. 149) conscripts this "celebrated piece of sociological research" there is a telling shift in his argument. In his view, the strength of this sociological evidence of the weakness of congregational ecclesiology in managing power does not trump theological considerations which are supreme in assessing "...what is appropriate for the mission of the Church" (2006, p. 150). It would seem that for Sykes theological considerations are the final arbiter in deciding what insights are to be heeded from the social sciences.

It is Sykes' failure to make explicit the relationship of knowledge and power that leads him to be able to declare an uneasy truce with the episcopate. I would suggest that power is not principally about the choice between episcopacy and congregationally ordered Churches but about the capacity of people to know and create knowledge. This is a knowing of ourselves in relation to the Other (God and other human beings). Why would Sykes (2006, p. 149) prefer an episcopalian form of Church order on the assumption that power is somehow clearly identifiable by external dress codes and a formal legal framework rather than a congregational ecclesiology of "noble purpose" in which those with power are "...slinking round the corridors anonymously in pale blouses and dark suits..." ? His language takes on a pejorative tone. I recall following his argument to this point and suddenly realising that I had travelled with someone who knew his destination before he started the journey. Sykes is a male academic having inhabited the structures of the Church as a

bishop. Was it possible for him to come to any other conclusion? It appears to me that his ecclesial commitments and role within those structures foreclosed on the depth of his critique. I am not suggesting that he should embrace 'egalitarianism' but rather I am pointing to a missed an opportunity to interrogate his own reasons for opting for his ecclesial *habitus* having neglecting "the very shaping of theological discourse itself" (Graham, 2009, p. 224).

My approach stands in contrast to Sykes' in that I critique power and knowledge through my own micro-context. This involves telling my story. My ART is deeply influenced by my ecclesiology. It is essential to write of my entry into the Congregational Way in young adulthood and sketch out how it is a driving force behind my commitment to the democratising practices of AR. Equally, I have shown how my 'ideal' of Congregationalism often collides with my 'ecclesiology in action' and the way in which power and knowledge may be a driver for collaborative action or for autocracy. The crucial issue is to adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion that is rigorous and courageous in risking a seismic shift (if necessary) in the reimagining of my *habitus*.

So Sykes (2006, p. 149) may conclude that "orders, offices and titles" may be of no consequence other than the risk of "pomp" potentially impeding the Church's mission. However, consideration of the "shaping of theological discourse" demands that silenced and absent voices are unearthed in examining the nature and significance of these external ecclesial markers. I contend that "orders, offices and titles" and "mitres" are bearers of historical significance. Those holding such positions of power occupied these roles and as a prerequisite possessed certain kinds of knowledge. "Order, offices and titles" are products of a patriarchal society designed to ensure that men who possessed wealth, social station and a concomitant education were enabled to maintain religious and political order. The ranks of the Church were replete with males who had knowledge and the power that goes with it. As for the dangers of egalitarianism, I question whether one study in the American context in the mid-twentieth century is sufficient to flag up the dangers of power cloaked by what Sykes identifies as the lack of "formal rules" (2006, p. 150). An argument could be made for the democratising and socially progressive influences of congregationally ordered Churches whilst at the same time recognising the way in which every *habitus* has both the capacity for development and the distortion of power and knowledge.

Graham (2009) on *Power, Knowledge and Authority* envisions a de-centred theology in which the discourse is sculpted by voices on the margins. The liberative trajectory of theology is not naïve deference to an idealised Other (e.g. the poor, women etc...) but rather a gritty engagement with those who experience life as disempowered, particularly through being invisible. Being able to make claims to knowledge is central to liberation. Graham (2009, p. 227) offers "three motifs" expressed as "...the political imperative of excavating hidden lives; the cathartic and existential power of giving voice to experience; and the need for theology to speak in the authentic language and culture - the 'vernacular' - of the poor." The liberative impulse is fraught with challenges. She identifies first, the danger of "romanticizing either poverty or the poor" whilst insisting upon the necessity of this "*preferential* dimension" (2009, p. 235, italics original); second, the tyranny of imposing on women a framework of what it is to be liberated (Graham referring to Fulkerson, 1994); third, contrary to the scriptural phrase "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32) she proffers a summary of Foucault's argument "...that knowledge itself is so thoroughly infused by the interests of domination and ideology that there is no such thing as 'emancipatory' (as if neutral) truth. Knowledge certainly carries its own power dynamics..." (2009, p. 235); and finally, a hollow deference to the margins - "the danger of tokenism" (2009, p. 235). She goes on to explore the specific implications for public theology of "bridging the gulf of power" between those established in the discourse and those voices struggling to be heard from "the underside" (2009, p. 237). This complexified picture of power, knowledge and authority requires established stakeholders exploring "...responsible ways of representing others' (and our own) experiences that for whatever reason have struggled to find their way into the mainstream" (2009, p. 240). The agenda she sets for the public theologian requires clarity about the political and ethical implications of knowledge generation and dissemination. Such clarity comes of the self-reflexive practitioner who is transparent about choices and who is in company with critical friends.

An overview of power and knowledge in participatory research is developed by Gaventa and Cornwall (2008). They survey key concepts of power in the work of Lukes and Foucault and the way in which knowledge is within the sphere of power. A conventional participatory construction of power was that it was something that some have and others do not. Those who do not have power need to take power

from those who do. The purpose of participatory research was to search for equity. Lukes challenged the idea of 'power over' and identified three interrelated perspectives on power and knowledge. The first is the way in which knowledge is marshalled to dominate public debate (e.g. expert knowledge is deemed superior to the amateur). The second strand is that those who exercise power by controlling knowledge production are able to determine whose voice is heard or whose is muted. Third, the gatekeepers of knowledge are able to shape public consciousness in such a way that the poor and marginalised do not readily perceive their condition and remain passive (2008, pp. 173-175). They suggest that such an analysis construes all power as something which is negative, a tool of oppression.

They opt for the interpretations of those who have developed Foucault's work on power in a more positive direction. Accepting Foucault's view that power is enmeshed in all social relations, it is in itself neither essentially good nor bad. Power has potentially "productive and positive aspects" (2008, p. 175). For them, what is vital in Foucault's analysis is the way in which he construes knowledge and power as being bound up together. The implication of this is that "Knowledge, as much as any resource, determines definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom" (2008, p. 176). In their model of participation they suggest that power brings about change when we recognise three "dimensions": first, the plurality of "knowledge" (ways of knowing) is a resource shaping our decision making power; second, the development of critical capacity to perceive who participates (or not) in liberative "action"; and third, the deepening of "critical consciousness" (2008, pp. 179-182).

Gaventa and Cornwall's central concerns come to the fore in the concluding analysis of power and knowledge in public spheres. Parallel with Graham's focus on the margins in public theology, their participatory research work is with the "...relatively powerless and excluded groups in a development context" (2008, p. 182). They reiterate the questions they asked in a previous version of this chapter (2006) wondering "What happens when participatory methods are employed by powerful institutions? Whose voices are raised and whose are heard?" (2008, p. 182) These questions arise from participatory approaches to research and development particularly among poor communities going "mainstream". The concern is that participatory methodology is being commandeered to serve the purposes of those who hold power and knowledge behind a thin veneer of democracy. They argue that

whatever the complexities of negotiating power and knowledge in "participatory research" and the risks of being colonised, the dangers of not engaging are far greater (2006, p. 80). They ascertain an increased suspicion of the knowledge of experts. Such expertise is being challenge by notions of multiple ways of knowing. This has combined with "democratic participation" that encourages people to become involved in bringing their knowledge "to public debate" (2008, p. 183). They recognise the skewing that could occur through selective invitation to participate as well as questioning the weight that contributions carry in relation to others. More important than giving attention to "...whose voices count *within* new policy spaces" (2008, p. 185, italics original) is the question of who sets the agenda for these arenas. They suggest these are often determined in seclusion and that there remains "...the need for mobilization and action outside the 'new democratic spaces', both to continue to challenge the barriers that prevent certain issues for [sic] arising as well as to mobilize the knowledge and voices of those who are excluded from them" (2008, p. 185). The challenges involved in representing the knowledge generated through participatory research both in the local and global context are not minimised. They identify "...critical questions about who speaks for whom, with whose knowledge and with what accountability" (2008, p. 186). Participatory research is an ongoing critical pursuit of inclusion which enfolds voice, participation, and equity of knowledge forms (2008, p. 186).

CONCLUSION

In offering a critical account of the dialogue that prompted me to move up onto the dais into order to become visible, I have set out the complexity of attending to my positionality as a preacher and researcher. Herr and Anderson's continuum offered a heuristic tool with which to examine the way in which I managed to inhabit my role as insider-outsider. Key to finding a place to stand before the congregation is being visible to the congregation. Visibility is achieved through sustained dialogue with self and participants. I identified the necessity of the communicative space making visible the relations of power and knowledge.

My ideal of being the preacher who goes *with* my congregation as a collaborator and co-learner does not always match my relational practices. Being proactive in exposing and examining relations of power between me and the congregation in the dialogical spaces creates the opportunity to correct distortions.

In the next chapter I offer an analysis of power and wisdom, silence, and feelings as crucial themes generated through the co-planning meetings and Word Café. These critical narratives are provisional accounts of the learning that occurred in the dialogical space of Word Café and how I negotiated my insider-outsider positionality as preacher and researcher.

CHAPTER 7

REFUSING A CONCLUSION:

CONTINUING TO NEGOTIATE THE INSIDER-OUTSIDER TERRAIN

> All I knew was that in my work, it would not be a case of going from theory to practice. It would have to be the other way around, a necessity of proceeding from practice to theory...
> I wonder if you ever reach that point in your life or in your work where you are certain you will never have to start all over again (Donovan, 2001, p. 22).

INTRODUCTION

Awareness of where I stand before my congregation - my positionality - demands awareness of the way in which power and knowledge is embedded in the social fabric of my local context. I have identified three narrative themes which emerged from the research process through which I explore various aspects of my positionality. I demonstrate the self-reflexive process in my role as practitioner and co-researcher and in so doing augment my critique of the extent and limitations of Word Café as collaborative research and the opening of communicative space.

In this final chapter I refuse to reach a set of conclusions but rather point to three particular areas of action learning which demonstrate the complexities involved in embodying authenticity as a preacher and researcher. This is a deliberate move grounded in the epistemological framework proposed in ART. The essence of ART is that it focuses on local, specific contexts and does not have the aim of creating generalized knowledge. By this I am resisting the notion that the discoveries of ART are universally applicable to every preacher and congregation. This does not mean that the insights gained in this ideographic study are confined to the local context. Rather, there is a sense in which the transformation I and my congregation experienced (and continue to experience) may resonate with other preachers and congregations. Dick (2003, p. 256) invites us to "Think of action research as performing art... It can be informed by understanding (that is, theory) from past experience. To some extent the experience may be someone else's." ART is a dialogical mode that adapts to the particular *praxis* of the *habitus* proffering overlapping and divergent insights (cf. Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, pp. 149-150; Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 46-49).

The focus on transforming my practice of preaching the Bible with my congregation gave rise to ART and falls into the category of what Gustavsen (2003, 2014) discusses as "the problem of the single case." He dismisses the idea that an

accumulation of action research cases could ever lead to an overarching or "complete theory" (2003, p. 94). What he proposes is "...to create and support *social movements*" (2003, p. 95, italics original). I would argue with Dick (2003) and Reason (2003) that it is not a choice between the single case or the creation of social movements. Shotter (2003, p. 301), quoting Wittgenstein, suggests that

> ...social movements cannot be created 'out of the blue', they are created and supported by the continual identification and recognition of new openings in our practices that already exist in their "incipient forms".

The insights that emerged from my single case inquiry were formed out of already existing practices and were transformed. The following analysis of the themes of power and wisdom, silence, and feelings are provisional. My aspiration is that the transformation we experienced will serve as an invitation to others to explore ART in their own contexts of preaching and in other areas of congregational life.

DISCOMFITING WORDS: POWER AND WISDOM

This is a critical account of a discussion that arose in one of the co-planning meetings around 'wisdom' and 'power' (all unattributed quotations come from PPPM, 26.05.2010, group 3, pp. 11-14). In this section, I flesh out the way in which the dialogical space emerged. I have discovered that the *praxis* of Freire's dialogical word is processual and not something arrived at in an instant. The horizontal relations conducted in humility are formed through individual and corporate reflexivity. My memory of the dialogue was of being surprised that these themes were so significant to one of the co-planning groups. I recall being uncomfortable too. In writing this critical reflection I have revisited the transcripts and the video footage of the dialogue and found my own insights extended further. This is evidence that the writing process is integral to learning.

The dialogue centred on the themes of power and wisdom and the vigorous debate revealed ambiguities that were not easily resolved. This story of our grappling with wisdom and power in our local context is echoed both in AR and PT. I relate the experience and critically peel back the layers as I analyse what was happening particularly in terms of Argyris' action science concepts of espoused theory and theory in use. This will further demonstrate the way in which my research method was emergent.

The words ‘wisdom’ and ‘power’ were part of the definition of AR which I prepared for the power point presentation at the initial Church Meeting (see p. 16). For those who had been unable to attend I wrote an article giving my account of what had happened at the Church Meeting and included the power point slides (Boyd, 2010a). This was to raise awareness of the AR process within the congregation. Then I used the slides again at the co-planning meetings as a departure point for discussion. My intention was that co-planning participants would challenge and re-shape the ideas I presented. In order to invite as wide a participation as possible there were morning, afternoon, and evening sessions planned over a period of three weeks (though only the afternoon group met for a third session). After the first day of co-planning meetings I confided in my journal that, “I fear that in my desire to recap the Church Meeting presentation/discussion...I directed the meeting too strongly” (PJ, 26.05.2010). Here I am grappling with my position of power in terms of steering the group and by force of my knowledge both as minister and as action researcher.

Power isn’t the right word

I had just expressed that “...power is not a negative thing...power is a potential” (cf. Grant, et al., 2008, p. 592; Reader, 1994, p. 46). A participant pushed against my assertion, “I just don’t like that phrase at all….” Another person chimed in, “I don’t like the word power, what other word could you use instead of power?” The anxiety of participants is expressed by Sims (2008, p. 203): “I’ve been wondering if the concept of power carries some negative connotation for us most of the time.”

I was taken by surprise. I was destabilised to such an extent that it felt like I had not quite followed what had just been said. I asked “...which one? Power?” I was left in no doubt that “...power is the word that we’re not comfortable with.” A third participant mediated by offering the word “potential” in place of the word “power”.

Of the three sessions held that particular day, this was the first clash of ideas. But there was also an internal clash going on. I had set out to listen to people and to be challenged by them. The experience of putting forward an idea about power and having it vigorously tested aroused feelings of defensiveness.

Looking at the video footage my body language is closed even prior to the expressed dislike of the word power. This makes uncomfortable viewing for me. My legs are crossed and extended straight out in front of me. My arms are folded and I hook and unhook the elbow of my right arm over the back of my chair almost as if I cannot decide how to position myself in relation to the rest of the group. I appear to be nervous and trying hard to relax. When it is made clear that "...power is the word that we're not comfortable with" I adjust my glasses and rub my lips together (*is my mouth dry?*). The group is sitting in a tight semi-circle in order to include everyone within the frame of the video recording and all the participants display similar 'closed' postures (folded hands, crossed legs and in some cases both). I am sitting apart from the group in order to operate the laptop for the power point presentation.

I recall this moment as tense. I was torn between arguing against any kind of replacement for the word power and being open to the ideas being expressed by two members of the group. I experienced this as a dissonance of desires. On the one hand I wanted to be attentive to what I perceived to be an opposing view point and on the other to justify my own position in such a way as to close down the discussion. This latter desire was to win the argument. In essence I had the urge to exercise power in order to dominate.

Prior to the two group members expressing their dislike of the word power I had expressed my view that "power is a potential" and then admitted my anxiety. "...I think the preacher has most of the power in this situation and so by opening up the dialogue I actually feel a bit frightened oh, what are we in for here?" In a convoluted search for words I speak my fear of "…when one of you says something that hurts my feelings." Entering into this co-planning process was decentring my own sense of power to control what I heard or did not hear from others.

My anxiety in this situation resulted in something of a missed opportunity for understanding. One of my supervisors asked me if I understood why there was such a resistance to the word power: "Was it the idea that power existed within churches? Or was it simply a preference for a different descriptor/category for the phenomenon?" (PJ, 21.06.2010). My hunch was that the two participants looking for a different descriptor were expressing distaste for the idea that power existed within the Church. My defensiveness shut me off from interrogating why the word power was discomfiting.

There was a visible shift in my body language when the mediating word "potential" was introduced. I uncrossed my legs and arms and sat up straight. The dialogue was taking a turn in my favour, helping me to 'win'. The view was being expressed that it is important for the minister to know more than people in the congregation. In fact, the person said it was expected that the minister have greater knowledge because "....you have undertaken the theological side of things...most people are faith-related as opposed to theology...." This statement in itself reveals the perception that there is a dichotomy between theology and faith. I did not pursue this. My understanding of what this participant was expressing was whether or not those who did not have the 'knowledge' of the minister would feel free to ask questions without fear of being embarrassed.

I drew out the 'logic' of what was being said declaring that "knowledge is power" (L. D. Brown & Gaventa, 2008, p. 172). A participant who had been silent up to this point said that there would be less threat or confrontation in the sharing of knowledge if "empowering relationships" existed. There are those who have more knowledge in an area than others. Being able to ask questions depends on the manner in which that knowledge is held and communicated by the minister. It may be empowering or disempowering to those who consider themselves not to be as knowledgeable. "…It's about knowing the empowering which works both ways." During this contribution I nodded my head in agreement and murmured assent, clearly signalling that this last speaker was articulating my view point. I proceeded to wrap up the conversation with what I perceive now to be contradictory messages. I used biblical examples of positive uses of the word 'power' (e.g. power from on high, power of the cross) in order to assert my point of view: "So this word power is used in all sorts of different ways so we don't see it as er as just a negative thing..." In order to conceal my 'win' I stated the limits of my own theological knowledge. Then with a sweeping gesture of inclusion (*or condescension?*) pointed out that other participants have "...expertise that I don't have..." A participant who had not contributed to the dialogue on power remarked, "In today's business speak it would say that would be a win-win situation." This is the language of 'winning'. What is astonishing to me is that I affirm this 'win-win' dynamic by asserting that "the old way of doing things" required knowing everything and possessing absolute power. I imply that the 'win-win' model purported by a participant meant that complete

knowledge and power was not as necessary now as it was then. On reflection this hardly seems credible.

My inner conflict was mirrored in my vacillating body gestures. This turmoil is illumined by the theories of action in Argyris and Schon (via Dick & Dalmau, 2000). Their concept of espoused theories and theories-in-use gave me a framework for understanding that

> ...We all have a strong propensity to hold inconsistent thoughts and actions. The links between what we think we are trying to achieve and the way we go about it are often not what we imagine: our espoused theories differ from our theories-in-use. To put it simply, we *don't* always practise what we preach...." (2000, italics original)

Dick and Dalmau note that the realisation of such inconsistency often arouses strong feelings. The human default *modus operandi* is to suppress these inconsistencies from surfacing into consciousness. Argyris argues that this involves "covering up" and then "covering up the cover up" whilst making our inconsistency "undiscussable" and the "undiscussable undiscussable" (1993, p. 20). This is borne of a defensiveness that begins early in human development to shield from "embarrassment or threat" (p. 20) 'Theory-in-use' is any action undertaken to avoid these feelings and to disguise our tracks.

Based on his research, Argyris *et al.* discovered in the first instance that there is often a thoroughgoing mismatch between espoused theory and theory-in-use. He noticed the strategies employed to conceal such discrepancies. Second, whilst espoused theories ranged dramatically, theories-in-use had the essential feature which he calls "face saving". "When encountering embarrassment or threat, bypass it and cover up the bypass" (1993, p. 51). In Model I (1993, p. 52) he delineates four 'governing values':

1. Achieve your intended purpose.
2. Maximize winning and minimize losing.
3. Suppress negative feelings.
4. Behave according to what you consider rational.

The three 'action strategies' which arise from these values:

1. Advocate your position.
2. Evaluate the thoughts and actions of others (and your own thoughts and actions).
3. Attribute cause for whatever you are trying to understand.

The actions have to enable a person to "...achieve at least your minimum acceptable level of being in control, winning, or bringing about any other result" (p. 52). Argyris' "governing values" and "action strategies" are useful in gaining insight into what was going on internally and externally in my exchange with participants.

It is significant that I had encountered the ideas of espoused theory and theory-in-use five years previous and had set out to practice this kind of learning. Curiously, it was only through this self-reflexive writing that I came to recognise in this dialogue my own contradictions in my practice. This suggests that relinquishing defensive patterns of behaviour in favour of authentic learning values and action strategies is the action-reflection work of a life time.

I now turn to analyse the co-planning conversation about power through the lens of the Model I governing values and action strategies. My theory-in-use 'advocated' my definition of power. I 'evaluated' the comments of the two participants as a challenge to my point of view. I assessed that their dislike of the word power arose from their misunderstanding of what it really is. I wanted to make them understand my point of view and 'win' the argument by persuading them of my viewpoint. Because I wanted to 'hear' what they were saying (espoused theory) and equally wanted to defend my definition (theory-in-use), I adopted an uncomfortable silence and a defensive physical position. I attempted to 'suppress negative feelings' of threat and of wanting to 'win' and take back 'control' of the understanding of the group. I 'maximized winning' by leaning into the conversation by sitting up and opening up my bodily stance only when participants spoke who were advocating and thus affirming my 'position'. By doing this I was communicating that this person's view was correct. The participants who expressed 'dislike' of the word 'power' did not speak again after initially raising their concern.

Model I values and actions contrasts with Argyris' Model II governing values of "valid information, informed choice, and vigilant monitoring of the implementation of the choice in order to detect and correct error" (1993, p. 55). The behaviours consistent with these values are "...action strategies that openly illustrate how the actors reached their evaluations or attributions and how they crafted them to encourage inquiry and testing by others" (1993, p. 55). Whilst this is particularly related to an organisational context, the dialogue around the word power could have been quite different. Instead of 'covering up' my inner conflict, I could have acknowledged my defensive feelings to myself and perhaps with the group. In doing

so, I could have committed myself to exploring what exactly the participants did not like about the word 'power' opening myself up to the possibilities of mutual inquiry. Careful listening would not have prevented me from expressing my view but would have allowed for it to be a contribution offered out of a learning motive.

Some are wise while others are otherwise

I had committed myself to keeping the co-planning sessions to approximately an hour and so I was looking for ways to move the dialogue forward by claiming that the group discussion was "...leading into this". Perhaps I was referring to "...knowing the empowering it works both ways" as a springboard into my claim that "Everyone has wisdom and knowledge to contribute and this is what I really like. Teachers are students and students are also teachers."

Again, watching this sequence and hearing my voice speaking these words feels uncomfortable. I had to gather up courage to view this segment of the dialogue. This is not how I remember it. I knew there had been a debate. I knew we had not agreed. But I had no recollection of being so defensive. My unease has surfaced through this process of critical observation making apparent the conflict between my espoused theory and theory-in-use. This is made more disconcerting because I was advocating AR and yet enacting a didactic, banking style educative manner. This is akin to the seven owner-directors that Argyris (1993) studies in *Knowledge for Action*. All of them left their previous organisation because of "...the defensive organizational routines and...wanted to create a consulting organization that had minimal defensive routines but...found themselves creating an organization that had the very features they deplored" (1993, p. 49). His question is my question, "How do we explain the creation of defensive routines in a *new* organisation by the very people who deplored them?" (p. 49, italics original) This recognition might lead me to despair but for the belief that, "Learning occurs whenever errors are detected and corrected" (1993, p. 49; cf. Mellor, 2001) .

My declaration about wisdom, knowledge and the mutuality of the teacher-student relationship is based on the phrase Freire coined "teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (1970, p. 61). Two participants expressed agreement with my assessment

with one saying, “Every day’s a school day, yeah you’re right” and the other, “It’s very true.” My body language is open, sitting up straight, arms and legs unfolded.

Then a bombshell was dropped by a participant: “I don’t think everybody does have wisdom. They have knowledge and will have knowledge to contribute. Some people have wisdom to contribute but I don’t think everyone has wisdom.” I adjust my glasses, pushing them up the bridge of my nose, cross my legs, and hook my right arm on the back of my chair, and purse my lips. The participant asked me what I meant by wisdom. My response is that everyone has the potential for making good choices. Even “broken people” have “something in them that’s good” for making wise decisions. The response was robust, “Some good isn’t wisdom is it?” and I began to recognise the weakness in my own definition of wisdom. How could I save face?

The participant who mediated in the discussion of power did so again, proposing that wisdom was replaced by the word “experience”. The example is given of a drug addict and then it is modified to “past drug addict”. “They’re always the best people to actually put across the errors of the ways of going down that route.” I recognise now that implicit within this example is that it is not enough to have had the experience of drug addiction. It is only the drug addict who has learned from their experience who is best placed to share their wisdom. I did not perceive this in the moment but only now as I review the footage and transcript.

I adjust from claiming that “everyone has wisdom” to having “the capacity for wisdom”. I recall knowing at the time that I could not defend my assertion and yet the governing value of minimising my loss meant I was unable to modify my position. There is a chink of Model II behaviour in that I do detect my error and minimally acknowledge it. “I’m not saying you’re wrong ***X*** but actually I’m just thinking about what you’re saying um. I would have said everyone has wisdom but I’ll have to think about that.” The immediate response from that person was, “We agree to differ” and there was group laughter which diffused the tension. The person goes on to emphasise that out of the whole presentation it was the words power and wisdom that “really hit me”. Looking at this exchange critically I want to inquire into why I did not probe this issue. It strikes me that a more productive, learning exchange would have arisen if I had asked the participant what they understood wisdom to be and opened it up into the group. It seems to me that my assertion that

'everyone has wisdom' had been exposed and I was attempting to minimise my 'losing'.

I have critically demonstrated the nature of the gap between my espoused theory and theory-in-practice and noticed glimmers of Argyris' Model II learning behaviours. Though I did not take action within the group to widen the dialogue to inquire into the meaning of wisdom and to 'test' the adequacy of my claim, I subsequently entered into dialogue with three co-planning participants the following day after prayers. One was the person who had agreed to disagree with me, and two others had participated in the earlier co-planning sessions in which the issue of wisdom had not generated a discussion. In my journal I detect a reluctant admission from me that "The more I think about it, the greater validity there appears to be in X's critique. Wisdom, as X understands it, is experience and good judgement put into practice. Wisdom is a gift" (PJ, 27.05.2010). Our conversation leads me to consider whether there are "different senses in which we use the word 'wisdom'." What began to emerge was that there is a perception of wisdom referring to those who act wisely and are perceived to have the 'gift' of wisdom. This is viewed as distinct from the human capacity for wisdom. This second sense is consonant with the underpinning value of World Café expressed by Brown, "...that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges" (2005, p. 4).

A further aspect of wisdom surfaced after the prayer session when two of the participants asserted that "wisdom is God and is expressed in Jesus". This led me into further inquiry. If wisdom is the pursuit of God and folly is finding wisdom outside of God, is there wisdom outside of the Christianity? In other words, is it possible to be wise without pursuing God? Rooms (2012, p. 84) assumes that *phronēsis* exists beyond the bounds of Christian conception and frames the key question for PT: "...What makes this universal hermeneutical process which can be done by any human being or set of human beings actually Christian?" This question is one that continues to demand a response from practical theologians.

The role of community is crucial in developing wisdom. Rooms (2012, p. 84) is clear that "...the development of *phronesis*...requires a set of habits within a community for it to occur faithfully, it is not simply something that the individual does alone." Rooms (2012, p. 84) draws attention to Graham's (2002) "shared practical sensibility" which is an adaption of Bourdieu's conception of *habitus*. The

community nurtures members of the community in its values and practices whilst each member effects change to the community from within (See discussion in Chapter 2, pp. 76-81; cf. Graham, et al., 2005, p. 194).

Among action researchers it is Eikeland and Kemmis who explicitly consider the nature of *phronēsis* and the way in which it is nurtured and developed in social space. Eikeland (2012) offers a sustained analysis based on his understanding of Aristotle. He develops two aspects to *praxis*: *praxis* on the way up and *praxis* on the way down. *Praxis* on the way up requires *skhole* or leisure space free from the pressure to act which is devoted to critical dialogue and the development of *habitus.* *Praxis* on the way up takes place within the *skhole* (apprentices with masters) through dialogue and "...helps articulate what we carry with us as habituated tacit knowledge: our *habitus*. It also helps us on our way from novices to experts and to virtuoso performers" (2012, p. 29). *Praxis* on the way down is *phronēsis*. *Phronēsis* is "virtuous performance" or "practical reasoning" (p. 20) as a consequence of having acquired a *habitus* of competency in the *skhole* through the dialogical process (pp. 30-31).

Building on the work of Habermas, Kemmis (2008) explicates his critical participatory AR approach. He identifies that its central aim is to open communicative space (2008, p. 127). He is not advocating a talking shop but is clear that this approach has "...the practical aim of *phronesis* - the commitment to acting wisely and prudently in the particular circumstances of a practical situation" (p. 133). Kemmis (2008, p. 126) identifies the 'self' as a sociality clearly distancing himself from individualist notions of *praxis* (as in the work of Schon). Though Kemmis' treatment of *phronēsis* is distinct from Eikeland, there is shared conviction that *phronēsis* is the work of spaces created for the purpose of fostering wisdom.

My critique of the dialogue on power and wisdom with the co-planning group bears characteristics of a *skhole* or communicative space. In terms of Eikeland's *skhole* I am an apprentice in need of a master. The need for a 'master' or 'teacher' to model good practice in facilitation was clear to me as I planned the Word Café. Action researcher David Adams was a sounding board for ideas and showed me how to host thus serving as a 'master'. Reading about the World Café method was one thing, to see it done was quite another. So I wrote of the first event, "He'll facilitate it so I can watch and learn" (PJ, 7.10.2010).

The dialogical aspect of both *skhole* and communicative space inevitably involves clashes of ideas not to mention personalities. My response to the challenge put to both of my assertions about wisdom and power did not match my ideal. However, the dialogue continued outside of the co-planning group. It is apparent to me that ultimately I did allow myself to be decentred. This indicates that the communal relationships I shared with co-planners were sufficient for my new learning and action. The triangulation of the research process facilitated my ability to identify the gap between my espoused theory and theory-in-action. It has opened up the possibility of increasing authenticity in action.

SILENCE AFTER THE WORD

In this section I unpack the nature of silence for the involved researcher. It is rooted in the particular practice of silence following the sermon which emerged as a theme in the Word Café. The importance of the cycles of action-reflection that led to this new form of intentional practice is with regard to the way in which it became apparent that some voices were heard over others. The significance of silence as I treat it here concerns the way in which my position as researcher influenced my attunement to those participants calling for silence. I show how my self-reflexive practices in partnership with co-researchers in the Word Café enabled me to extend my range of frequencies enabling me to hear perspectives that were not in tune with my preferred pitch. Through the analysis of the narrative I demonstrate the fluidity of moving between insider-outsider positionalities.

I commence by identifying key aspects of the context into which the whole question of silence arose. First, in the Congregational tradition (as with many non-conformist denominations) there is a great emphasis on hymn singing, preaching and prayers. Worship is characteristically vocal.

Second, there are notable features surrounding the Word Café on the 19 December 2010 connected to an unusual weather event. I set out the atypical aspects of this event in that they appear to be relevant in two ways. First, it demonstrates the way in which AR adapts in a responsive way to real life. Second, I introduced *silence after the word* on the back of data that arose from a relatively small group of participants.

Crucially, it was the second Word Café and my first time as facilitator. This Word Café flagged up both the issue of verbosity in prayer and the desire for silence

in worship which led to a distinctive new practice. My affective disposition was fearful in that it was my first Word Café 'going solo'. My anxiety was heightened by a weather event in which fifteen centimetres of snow had fallen the day before. This contributed to the worship service having unusual features. I took the decision to go ahead with the worship service after consulting with the Church Secretary. My plan was to assess whether enough people would stay to make Word Café viable. In my journal I record that "My main reason for pressing on is that 'weather' is a real life condition. We are not cancelling church therefore we should carry on with the Word Café no matter how few attend. This reflects the Action Research [sic] premise that life is messy and research is untidy" (PJ, 17.12.2010).

Third, my spiritual formation particularly through engaging in the Ignatian exercises, had drawn me increasingly towards silence in the discipline of prayer. This began to bump up against the corporate congregational practice of oral prayer. In my three pastoral charges, whenever I had introduced silence into prayer, I believed that I was imposing silence on the congregation. I was inclined towards the practice of silence but worried that it was not being welcomed by my congregations. It is worth noting that this was my belief about the situation and that I had not endeavoured to discover what my congregations actually thought about it. My assumptions about silence in worship were challenged on multiple levels when I engaged in dialogue through Word Café with the Witney congregation.

My acquired predilection for silence in personal and corporate prayer clashed with the Christian tradition in which I had been formed and was at odds with my temperament. The impulse towards silence was tightly bound up in learning to listen. In company with my spiritual director I discerned that the trajectory of God's movement of grace in my life was to enter into the silence. My purpose in constructing the narrative that follows here is to show how the theme of silence was a pressing matter in my own spiritual formation which accounts at least in some measure for my heightened receptivity to those participants in Word Café who articulated the need for silence in worship. In my journal I write of

> ...a growth in listening. I have followed the call of God to be silent before him.
>
> ...I have become more attentive to listening to the present moment whether of joy or suffering and pain and to receive that moment as graced by God's presence. The research has also been a process of learning to listen - drawing upon God's grace to hear what *he* is saying and what *others* are saying.

> ...True listening requires an openness of spirit. It is a turning away from self to the other.
> ...It is the first step of the pastoral cycle: being attentive to the experience without judging - without rushing to conclusions. There is nothing easy about listening because listening requires vulnerability. It requires the confrontation of ego - the acknowledgement of pride - of the need to stay in control - to interpret what is happening before one has listened. Listening is a gift of grace...received by one who is prepared to allow God to silence them (PJ, 20.01.2011).

The catalyst for this movement towards silence was in a particular encounter with a longstanding friend on the 2 October 2008. The conversation emerged in the context of my own excitement as I had recently completed the Ignatian exercises and in three months I would be joining the congregation in Witney as their minister. I was exuberant in relating my experience of the exercises to such an extent that I noted in my spiritual journal that "I detect that I'm smug in my life - my reading of scripture and prayer" (SJ, 1.10.2008). I refer to a conversation that day in which I was not genuinely listening to a person who was relating her experience of prayer. Instead "I was more interested in sharing my own experience. I also had feelings of superiority...it is so ugly" (SJ, 1.10.2008). This inattentiveness was magnified in a conversation I had with my friend. I was waxing lyrical about my imminent move and speaking of my experience of the exercises. I expressed the desire "...to get involved in spiritual direction" (SJ, 2.10.2008). His direct reply stunned me: "If I dare say, you'll need to learn to listen more and talk less" (SJ, 1.10.2008). This was a devastating observation made more so in that it came from a trusted friend whom I knew would not set out to hurt me. The pain of hearing the truth was the impetus for much soul searching as I wrestled with my non-listening stance. My friend's words confronted me with the full import of my hubris. In the months that followed I spent a lot of time with my spiritual director discerning how to work out this call to silence and attention to the activity of listening.

Having set the context for the theme *silence after the word*, I flesh out the features of the dialogue as it unfolded. The theme arose at the second Word Café (19.12.2010) which followed the heavy snowfall. In the event forty people attended the service though a good number of those gathered were from other congregations whose Churches had cancelled worship services. Ten people remained to participate in the Word Café, two of whom were visiting from another congregation. Four

others met at a later date (15.01.2011) to watch the video followed by a discussion. These consisted of two who had attended the service but could not stay on and two who had been involved in all aspects of the worship except the sermon because they were delivering provision for the children. In short, fourteen participants were involved in the conversations over a period of one month.

The data from the tablecloths included a comment about lost attention during the communion prayer due to wordiness (R, 19.12.2010, Table 4 WS 3, p. 4). This vantage point was countered by a participant who found that the way in which I wove the theme of the sermon into the communion "works well" (R, 19.12.2010, Table 1 WS 6, p. 5). I perceived that the call for silence was strong in that two recorded comments expressed the need for "quiet" (R, 19.12.2010, Table 2 WS 2, p. 5) and the desire for silence after the sermon (R, 19.12.2010, Table 1 WS 3, p. 5).

Here I make a critical comment about the method of World Café which we adapted to Word Café. Though it is possible that each comment represented only one conversation partner at the table it was equally possible that it reflected a multiple number of persons on the table. This highlights one of the weaknesses of the method: it was not possible to ascertain whether a comment was singular or plural. Theoretically a single participant could highjack a conversation and a comment written might not be representative. I could argue that the comment appeared on two of three tables and most probably did represent a wider set of interests. Equally, I could counter this with the possibility of a participant with an agenda carrying this theme with them. Recognising this as one of the limitations of the method it remains that at least views were being expressed and voices heard in a way that did not happen prior to the Word Café conversations. I acknowledge that my chosen action in response to what I heard as the call for silence had to remain open for further scrutiny (R, 19.12.2010, p. 6). This mitigated any skewing towards hearing particular voices. The cycles of dialogue continued and new actions scrutinised.

My response to the Word Café conversation data was to acknowledge "...the wordiness of my prayers and need to address this situation with careful planning and paying more attention to creating silent spaces in worship" (R, 19.12.2010, p. 5). One specific response was to act "...by finishing my sermon and sitting down for 1-2 minutes" (R, 19.12.2010, pp. 5-6). I instigated this change noting my prior unease about how the congregation would react. Subsequent to the practice of silence after

the sermon no one had made any comment about it. I surmised that this indicated "that people are OK with it" whilst committing to further consultation, perhaps at a Church Meeting (R, 19.12.2010, p. 6). The practice of silence after the sermon and during worship continued as a theme in the Word Café. However, I soon stumbled across something unexpected.

In the 6 February 2011 Word Café, I record that following my change in practice, "My impression was that the silences have been profound but I had not had any direct feedback" (R, 6.02.2011, p. 1). In my journal I note what appears to me to be the 'welcome' of silence with my perception that "What I need to do now is to find a way to have a dialogue about the silence. Is this intentional kind of silence (particularly after the sermon) helpful or not? How do people feel about it? How do they respond to this space? Is it uncomfortable or welcome?" (PJ, 23.02.2011). This is evidence that I was maintaining a hermeneutic of suspicion towards that impulse for silence that I had heard from some participants.

Following my transcription and thematisation of the data for the 6 February Word Café my impression of a positive reaction towards the practice of silence following the sermon was affirmed. Two participant comments made on the same table indicated this to me: "Pause worked after sermon. Time to settle, silence after sound. Balance" (R, 6.02.2011, Table 1 WS 2, p. 1); "Liked the pause after the sermon, time to reflect" (R, 6.02.2011, Table 1 WS 6, p. 1). I continued with the practice.

It was during the 6 March 2011 Word Café that I began to hear dissonance in the dialogue. It was transparent that "My own interior journey towards the prayer of silence..." was a settled knowledge that "...silence is 'needed' by worshippers..." (*is there a tone of superiority?*) thus justifying the change in "...my public practice" (R, 6.03.2011, p. 1). Four comments welcome the silence and time for reflection. However, all are recorded on the same tablecloth (R, 6.03.2011, Table 6 WS 1, 4, 7, 10, pp. 1-3). Again, is there a dominant voice here?

The voices for silence were challenged in the plenary session when a clash of views was starkly evident. Two participants articulated that they had experienced the silence following the sermon as being "too long" (R, 6.03.2011, p. 1). Other participants robustly countered that perspective. "It is clear then, that though silence within worship has been identified as important, not everyone is equally at ease with the silence. It strikes me that there are those in the congregation who would be

happy with extended periods of silence in worship whilst others would find this intolerable" (R, 6.03.2011, pp. 1-2). The expression of divergent perspectives confronted me with the need to take care "...against making sweeping assumptions..." recognising that the advocates for silence may "...actually represent a minority" (R, 6.03.2011, p. 2). Despite my recognition of the challenge that the practice of silence represents for some participants, I reveal my continued commitment to the practice as "...something that I need to foster in terms of teaching both practically and theoretically" (R, 6.03.2011, p. 3).

Silence after the sermon featured in two comments on the 17 April 2011. One considered the practice "Unique" (R, 17.04.2011, Table 2 WS 1, p. 8) and another in written feedback expressed gratitude for the silence on that particular day, judging that it was "v. 'right'" [sic] (A4 handwritten sheet, p. 2). On this occasion there were no voices of dissent.

In my reflections on the subsequent Word Café (22.05.2011), I offer an extended treatment of silence wondering, "...whether there are those participants who may find silence challenging...not expressing themselves. Are the calls for silence so vocal that some who feel differently might stay quiet?" (R, 22.05.2011, p. 1) One of the limitations of the Word Café method was that if recorded data on the table clothes was not discussed in the plenary, it was difficult to interpret the intent of certain comments. Two comments which appeared to me to be written in the same hand repeatedly expressed that "Silence is 'golden' - but not to/for everyone" (R, 22.05.2011, Table 4 WS 4; Table 5 WS7, pp. 1-3). Though it is the repetition of the same phrase it is a response to two different conversations.

In order to give a sense of the process I employed in attempting to interpret this data, I offer an extended quotation from my reflections:

> The participant does not link the comment to a particular aspect of silence. We do not know therefore, what the participant intended by their statement. What we can do is notice the nature of the recorded discussion on the rest of the table cloth.
>
> On Table 4 a number of writing styles referred to the noisiness of the children and the way it had distracted them. It could be that Table 4 WS 4 may have been saying that the noisiness wasn't a problem for them. In other words, silence before and during worship is not an issue. Thus silence is golden to some and yet not to all. Another possibility is that Table 4 WS 4 countered Table 4 WS 7 who felt that "The silence at the end of the sermon was beautifully still + gave a time to reflect on what had been said." In other words, Table 4 WS 4 may not be finding the silence to be 'beautiful'. I'm inclined to think that it may be the latter option.

> The reason is that on Table 5, WS 7 connects their comment to WS 8 who writes, "Setting time aside to pray and listen." The person who writes 'Silence is golden – but not for everyone" seems to be expressing the challenge that silence is for them. They may be expressing their own difficulty with being silent. Perhaps they may even be questioning whether silence necessarily has to be 'golden' for everyone.
>
> Whatever the intention or meaning conveyed by the repetition of this phrase in the same writing style, I think it is important to pay attention to the challenge that silence presents for people. A response to this is to keep my eyes and ears open over the next three Word Cafés to see if this kind of view is more fully expressed. Also, I commit myself to asking participants and members of the congregation how they feel about silence. I think this is something I need to explore intentionally. I have a suspicion that calls for silence is [sic] becoming the dominant narrative of our church community and that if people struggle with it they are not feeling confident to voice a counter narrative. Part of the reason for the dominant narrative is my own commitment to silence within my own spiritual formation and the exercise of my ministry. It is not to say that 'silence' is wrong. It may be however, that silence is not the natural posture of life for many people. To develop the practice of silence in worship the countering voices must be heard and receive a thoughtful response (R, 22.05.2011, pp. 2-3).

This demonstrates a measure of the complexity of interpreting these kinds of soft data. The limitations of the method suggest a set of possible insights that raised my awareness and required continuing attentiveness in practice. What was clear to me was that the practice of silence in its various aspects was problematic for at least one member of the congregation and thus likely posed a challenge for others too.

Appreciation of the silences in worship surfaced as a theme in the Word Café on the 12 June 2011. All the comments were positive towards silence, one through a written response and two on table cloths which appear to be in different handwriting styles. The former handwritten feedback expressed a personal appreciation of the silences convinced that "We need both silence and words; a telling of truth, a sharing of it and also the stillness and silence to let it sink deep and 'be' somehow" (R, 12.06.2011, p. 5). This participant perceived an increasing ease in the congregation with the silences writing, "I hope we're moving towards more silences in our worship and an appreciation of their value" (R, 12.06.2011, p. 5). This was a highly articulate response that by virtue of being written was not tested in the communicative space. Having identified the style of handwriting I was aware that this participant had been a strong advocate for silence in worship (not merely the silence following the sermon).

The comments of the other two participants in the Word Café affirmed the general tone of the written contribution. Table 2 WS 1 related that "peace came in the silence" whilst Table 5 WS 3 enthused "I loved the 2-3 minute total quiet time, chance to focus on what had been said" (R, 12.06.2011, p. 5). This was accompanied by an elaborate diagram with silence in the centre and a number of activities flowing out of it: thought, prayer, reflection, emotion, and question.

A contrasting response emerged from my telling of the story "The Great Hooray" which rounded off my sermon (Ted Walker as retold by Silf, 2003, pp. 208-209). The story swells with joyous emotion and so the silence following the sermon was at odds with the desire of one participant. Table 7 WS 3 wrote, "I wanted to shout 'Hooray' when we were asked to sit quietly and listen to what God is saying" (R, 12.06.2011, p. 6). I reflected that "This last response raises an interesting question for me. Is there a place to encourage people when prompted by the Spirit to break the silence?" (R, 12.06.2011, p. 6)

Silence was discussed again on the 24 July 2011 Word Café. Significantly this theme was confined to one of eight tables. I drew the conclusion that "...whilst it was an important issue on this table it was not something that cross-pollinated into other discussions" (R, 24.07.2011, p. 2). It is intriguing that the theme was not carried on to another table. It strengthens my view that the advocates for silence were firmly in the minority. I speculate that it is possible that the host on this table (which was appointed by the first round of participants and of whom I kept no record) may have stimulated this theme.

I have set out to demonstrate the cycles of action-reflection in the identification of the theme of silence, its implementation, and the ongoing scrutiny of the theme through the dialogical process surrounding the Word Café. Through the process of self-reflexivity I have exposed the way in which my own spiritual formation directed towards silence heard the voices of those whose call for silence resonated with mine. The first-person practice of silent prayer and journaling located within the second person relationships with a spiritual director and academic supervision raised my awareness of my own bias towards silence. This heightened awareness and sustained dialogue through the cycles of the Word Café encouraged dissenting voices to be heard.

The development of this theme with a new set of practices points to broader insights into my positionality as a co-researcher. I had made the transition from

being an outsider to the practice of silence to becoming an insider. My insider status as an advocate of the practice of silence echoed with a number of participants who shared insider status in the practice of silence. If it had not been for the self-reflexive research practices of journaling and conversations with critical friends, I could well have been unable to hear those for whom silence was not golden. In essence, though I located myself as a co-researcher with my congregation in which I was both the researcher and the researched, I was possessed of power in that I was taking the lead in instigating the inquiry and seeing it through.

Feminist action researcher Maguire (2006, p. 67) argues that "Turning the relationship between researchers and subjects inside out by promoting the approach of co-researchers in an effort to share or flatten power is at the heart of action research." Her contention is that "Feminist scholars often disclose their biases, feelings, choices and multiple identities, clearly locating themselves within the process" and have influenced the AR family (2006, p. 67). It is making this deliberate choice to be transparent that places strictures on the use and abuse of power. Maguire treats silence in terms of women and those who are subjugated finding their voices to speak. She highlights the way in which the powerful dominate and secure the continuation of the status quo by using silence. Maguire makes reference to a researcher, Chataway, who, in working with a Canadian First Nations community gained the insight that by engaging with a group of people and remaining above or outside them by withholding a viewpoint or opinion, she had placed responsibility for the continuing relationship onto them to initiate speech and action (2006, p. 65). In the Word Café dialogue centred on the practice of silence, it was the communicative space combined with my self-reflexivity that created a disposition in which I was shown to be biased and yet at the same time open to engagement with an opposing perspective.

Freire's (1970) treatment of word and silence illumines our particular practice of silence after the word. For him the word encompasses an indivisible relation between action and reflection. So with forthrightness he declares that "...to speak a true word is to transform the world" (1970, p. 68). He goes on to locate the quintessence of being human as naming and changing the world. No sooner has the world been named than it presents as a problem to be renamed. His activist portrayal is such that he claims "Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (1970, p. 69). Freire qualifies the silence he construes writing that

he is not dealing with the silence of "profound meditation". The silence of the mystic appears to be a withdrawal from the world and yet "...is only authentic when the meditator is 'bathed' in reality..." (1970, p. 69). So silence is a fuller participation in the world. In this view, any practice of silence is about being immersed in the true word, an integration of our embodied, thinking and feeling existence.

Another treatment is of 'Silent Worship' as explored in *The Idea of the Holy* (Otto, 1923). He defines the *numinous* as the 'creature-feeling' of the *numen*. The former is the experience of the divine or the wholly other. The *numen* denotes the mystery of the transcendent beyond moral goodness (1923, pp. 6-7). "The numinous is thus felt as objective and outside the self" (1923, p. 11) . He distinguishes between the *a priori* category of holiness in the *numen* and holiness in the outward appearance or in history. Apprehension of the divine follows cognitive recognition of "principles in the mind" which are "...not to be derived from 'experience' or 'history'" (1923, p. 179). Consciousness of the *numinous* inspires an ethical and moral response (1923, p. 115). For Otto "The Silent Worship of the Quakers is in fact a realization of Communion in both senses of the word - inward oneness and fellowship of the individual with invisible Reality and the mystical union of many individuals with one another" (1923, p. 218).

Freire locates the essence of being human with the naming of the world or *praxis*. Authentic silence is bathed in this kind of reality whereas Otto identifies the nature of what is real with the revelation of the divine to humans in the *numinous*. Otto posits that James' pragmatist category of the 'ineffable' is necessary only because he does not recognise the "faculties of knowledge and the potentialities of thought in the spirit itself" (Otto, 1923, p. 11; Watts, 2002, p. 4).

Lonergan (1972, p. 257) touches on the "the language of prayer and of prayerful silence" as the means through which a human subject is brought into relation with the divine. He calls this the realm of transcendence. Transcendence is the fourth aspect of consciousness following on from the realms of common sense (ordinary/everyday), theory (logic), and interiority (intentional consciousness) (1972, p. 257). Lonergan defines "Self-transcendence as the achievement of conscious intentionality" which occurs as we learn to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible (1972, p. 35). God is self-transcendent. Being created in his image is to be like him as self-transcending creature. The transcendental precept of

responsibility is about the value of what is good. God is good and the source of value. To understand God as self-transcendence is to affirm that he is acting in the world in love and that we are to join with him to act in love (1972, pp. 116-117). Whereas Otto conceives of *numen* as being above any idea of goodness, Lonergan is clear that whilst God's love is a mystery our self-transcendence is answered in his self-transcendence. The God who acts in love calls us to join in with him as we grow in our consciousness of what is good.

> There is a personal entrance of God himself into history, a communication of God to his people, the advent of God's word into the world of religious expression... Then not only an inner word that is God's gift of his love but also the outer word of the religious tradition comes from God. God's gift of his love is matched by his command to love unrestrictedly... (1972, p. 119).

Lonergan's vision of the realms of meaning are bound up in the human processes of experience and sensemaking echoing the nature of God. Skilfully moving through the realms of meaning into that of transcendence is not a flight from the world but one of intentionally acting with God in a world "mediated by meaning" (1972, p. 342). It is the language of prayer and of silent prayer that takes us into God's love and releases us to act in love in the world.

Part of the challenge of the practice of silence is that our participation in the world is fragmented and thus a 'false word'. The dichotomy between reflection and action, theory and practice, forces a binary of contemplative-scholar or practitioner. The thematic of silence after the word and the dissonant voices suggests the need for further exploration of the meaning and value of the practice of silence as a way of being 'bathed' in the reality of God who acts.

WHAT HAVE FEELINGS GOT TO DO WITH IT?

The character of Rosemary Cooke narrates the novel *We are all completely beside ourselves*, a story that begins in the middle (Fowler, 2014, p. 2). As the narrative unfolds she reveals that her sister Fern is a monkey. They were raised together for a time until one day she simply disappeared from Rosemary's life. This novel depicts how Rosemary is involved in sensemaking. She attempts to put together the fragments of memory imbued with the physicality of emotions. As new information comes to Rosemary and the pieces begin to fall into a coherent plot she realises that it is not merely a matter of cold cognitive processes but of affections. "We call them feelings because we feel them. They don't start in our minds, they

arise in our bodies, is what my mother always said, with the great materialist William James as backup" (2014, p. 223).

In exploring the integrity and dissonance between thought and practice I began with the intention of considering the role of feelings in practice. It was through Cartledge (2003, 2004) that I first encountered orthopathy (right affections) alongside orthodoxy (right believing/thinking) and orthopraxy (right acting). Prior to this I would have thought feelings to be entirely appropriate in my spiritual experience but would not have thought they had any place in theology. At that time I would have understood theology in this sense as being of the kind that might well be described using the categories of Cameron *et al.*: normative (e.g. scripture, creeds, doctrinal statements) and formal (theology of the theologians) (2010, pp. 54-55). It was the formal task of theologians engaging in a specialised discipline, what is described in popular Christian terms as 'ivory tower' theology. My impression that feelings were to be bracketed out of the formal task of theology is echoed in an anecdote by Green (2009, p. 137) in a comment made on one of his essays by one of his professors admonishing him to "Keep your emotions out of your theology young man." Practical theology has offered a corrective to this emotionless, cerebral approach to theology and raised the importance of feelings. This is reflected in the way in which attention to affections are included in various theological reflection approaches to a greater or lesser degree (Ballard & Pritchard, 2006, p. 98; Graham, et al., 2005, expressed as 'theology by heart'; Green, 2009, pp. 48, 70; Killen & de Beer, 2003). Conde-Frazier (2014, p. 239) in relating PAR and PT relates affections to power claiming that "Being able to discern emotions helps us recognize contradictions and confusion and gain clarity about power relations." Far from a self-indulgent pastime, acknowledging feelings is vital to exposing potential for manipulation and oppression.

Having encountered the concept of orthopathy as a legitimate aspect of the theological task, particularly in the activity of theological reflection, I was spurred on to explore affective responses before, during and after the sermon. In essence, my inquiry focused on what we think we are doing, what we do, and how we feel about what we are doing in preaching and whether through action-reflection there is a transformation in the quality of our experience. This theological-theoretical raising of my awareness to affections was the impetus for integrating attention to feelings in

the research process. The importance of this dimension was that it invited a holistic approach to the human person.

Heen (2005, p. 265) claims that attention to feelings is not strongly represented in AR literature. Subsequent to her assertion that feelings are "...surprisingly little discussed" (2005, p. 265) there has been increased treatment of this dimension. Attention to feelings is represented in the earlier "action turn" of Reason and Torbert (2001, p. 5); latterly the discussion in Bradbury *et al.* (2008, pp. 83-86) of Damasio's (1994) somatic markers as they relate to cognition and emotion; the cooperative inquiries of Heron and Reason (2006, p. 150, 2008, p. 368); the action inquiry of Torbert and Taylor (2006, p. 208; 2008, pp. 241-242); the integrity and presence in professional practice of Adams (2011); and Coghlan's assertions about the role of feelings in ascertaining value (2013, pp. 341, 348). In particular, Heron and Reason (2008), the founders of cooperative inquiry, develop their participatory worldview in the tradition of William James. They make the same reference to James as Fowler's Rosemary. In so doing they affirm "...that the very foundation of human perceptual sensibility is the capacity for feeling, which we define as a participatory relation with being and beings, integrating the distinctness of knower and known in a relational whole...in the shared presence of mutual encounter" (2008, pp. 368-369). Though the feelings in the inquiry process are evident such references are miniscule in terms of the breadth of the AR orientation. Furthermore, even those AR practitioners who acknowledge the importance of emotions in inquiry give very little evidence of this in their written work.

Heen sets out a holistic approach in which feelings lead to knowledge. Drawing upon the work of Hochschild (1990), Heen (2005, p. 266) claims that "Our feeling tells us about our relationship to what is going on in the world and how we stand in relation to that." Using a first person reflexive manner of writing she embodies the research of the "whole person" through her presentation. She ventures a question that has profound implications for knowledge: "*Is it that feelings actually are the basis for all we think we know?*" (2005, p. 270, italics original). Heen portrays the dichotomy in western thought "...between body and soul, between rationality and feelings" and that emotions have been regarded as an inhibitor to clear thinking (2005, p. 271; cf. Adams 2011, pp.111-112). Feelings may be regarded as "polluting" and raise anxiety levels because they do not want to be exposed to the

feelings of other people nor expose their own (2005, p. 272). Heen makes the case for AR that is explicit in its attention to emotion.

In emphasising feelings as the quintessence of life and what it is to know and be known, Heen propels the subject of feelings and inquiry onto centre stage. Importantly, she not only discusses the importance of feelings, she shows us what it means to be a feeling researcher and express that dimension in a written account (2005, pp. 268-271).

Since Heen's article, there are two significant AR contributions concerning the role of feelings in inquiry. The first is Ladkin's adaption of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of 'flesh'. She explores leadership as a bodily experience, "...the felt-experience of being part of a leadership dynamic" (2013, p. 321). She unfolds the affective somatic nature of leadership through a particular inquiry into a leader pseudonymously identified as Corbin within the context of a company referred to as Professional Services Firm. Crucially she acknowledges her "felt reaction" to Corbin's presence whether he was physically present or not over the nine months of her research (2013, p. 321). Key to her analysis is the importance of perception which she adopts from Merleau-Ponty. Perception is a bodily experience and it is the flesh that is "...the very ground from which perception arises" (2013, p. 330). It is kinaesthetic and visual and as such "Our bodies tell us what we feel, hear and smell - as well as all of the physiologically based responses which go along with those sense data" (2013, p. 330). She explains that it is from this "material" somatic ground of perception which leads to the "non-material, yet vital reactions between leaders and followers" (2013, p. 330).

Ladkin draws out three implications for leadership from this analysis. First, leaders and followers would do well to increase their awareness of "the bodily signals they give off to one another" (2013, p. 330). Second, leadership is nurtured and sustained by physical embeddedness within an organisation. It is important to be seen and to acquire first hand experience of what is going on and to make contact with those who are being led (e.g. the politician who knows the importance of "pressing the flesh" and kissing babies) (2013, p. 330). Third, leadership is relational. It is about that which goes between leader and followers (e.g. trustworthy/non-trustworthy, supportive/manipulative) (2013, p. 331). This embodied and relational approach to management correlates well with my experience as a feeling practitioner-researcher in relationship with feeling participants and co-

researchers. The felt experience of the preaching events and Word Café was a bodily, material experience generating non-material interactions. In this thesis I have demonstrated the holistic nature of knowledge generation, emerging out of what we did together.

Coghlan (2010, 2013) has developed insider action research with a focus on "interiority" and "authenticity". These qualities of interiority and authenticity are essential to first person inquiry and require the insider researcher to be "in tune with their own feelings" including "feelings of good will" and "frustrations" (2007, p. 339). As discussed in Chapter 2, Coghlan has developed the notion of authenticity based on the theologian and philosopher Lonergan's (1972, p. 53) conceptualisation of a process of "subjects being their true selves by observing transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible". Each of the precepts corresponds to Lonergan's (1972, pp. 14-15) operations of "...experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding". He asserts that at one level all who have the capacity for action and thought practice the precepts even though it is not at a conscious level. It is only through the intentional employment of the operations that a person becomes conscious of the transcendental method (1972, pp. 14-15). The trajectory of increased, intentional consciousness is "...the unfolding of a single thrust, the eros of the human spirit" which is "To know the good" (1972, p. 13). Lonergan's (1972, p. 27) conceptualisation of the good is that it is concrete. He offers a metaphor for this process of ever increasing awareness: "...from slumber, we awake to attend" (1972, p. 13). In unpacking the nature of interiority and authenticity, Coghlan (2010, p. 296) identifies "sensing" as one of the activities of the operation of experience which includes feelings along with all other "data of consciousness". He explicitly demonstrates a particular instance of attention-in-the-moment which began with the experience of feeling that a "...meeting was getting bogged down" (2008a, pp. 360-362, 2010, p. 302).

The realisation of Lonergan's conceptualisation of the human good as concrete reality leads him to examine several aspects ("components") which comprise what is good. What is of chief interest to me at this juncture is the attention he gives to feelings. His analysis is complex and for my purposes it is enough to note that his focus is on the spectrum of feelings as an intentional response to "value" or the "good" (1972, pp. 30-34). Feelings can flare up and be fleeting but can be experienced as developing in such a way that "...they channel attention, shape one's

horizon, direct one's life" (1972, p. 32). He posits the illustration of lovers who experience love as an ever increasing, deepening reality whether physically present to each other or not. It is the movement of two people coming to experience one another as "we" (1972, pp. 32-33). He chooses this example purposefully in that he makes it clear that his understanding of "value" and "good" are governed by the love of a self-transcendent God for his self-transcendent creatures. Lonergan defines self-transcendence as "...the achievement of conscious intentionality..." (1972, p. 35). Authenticity is the realisation of being made in the image of God "...being like him, in self-transcending, in being origins of value, in true love" (1972, p. 117). For Lonergan "reason" was located within the operations of experiencing, understanding, and judging. The highest level of cognitional activity was to do with deciding or the "heart's reasons" which are "feelings that are intentional responses to values" (1972, p. 115). The development of intentional feelings responding to the value of love is a developmental process and requires a full frontal acknowledgement of feelings both authentic and unauthentic in nature (1972, p. 52). In terms of our affections, he offers an uncompromising hermeneutic of suspicion directed in the pursuit of love:

> ...it is much better to take full cognizance of one's feelings, however deplorable they may be, than to brush them aside, overrule them, ignore them. To take cognizance of them makes it possible for one to know oneself, to uncover the inattention, obtuseness, silliness, irresponsibility that gave rise to the feeling one does not want, and to correct the aberrant attitude. On the other hand, not to take cognizance of them is to leave them in the twilight of what is conscious but not objectified (1972, pp. 33-34).

Unacknowledged feelings lead to the malady of "...alienation from oneself..." (1972, p. 34). Authenticity demands confrontation of the array of emotions we experience in order that our horizon is fully framed by love.

The significance of Coghlan's development of Lonergan's theological method in AR is that it contributes to the interdisciplinary nature of ART. In particular, it gives attention to feelings and affections as core to all forms of human knowing. Coghlan offers Lonergan's proposal of intentional consciousness as a framework for relating our subjective and objective knowledge. We know objects through a constant process of testing through our experience, understanding and judging. This knowledge of the objective world runs in tandem with our subjectivity which is an awareness of our own self (2013, pp. 337-338). Coghlan's proposal for an existential ethics in first person inquiry is directed towards the "good" which

involves knowing "value". He conceives threefold aspects to the good: first, "It satisfies practical needs and desires..."; second, systemic good of institutions; third, cultural good as commonly held values (2013, p. 340). His argument is that determining the good is the activity of a person in first person practice. This could be mistaken for individualism but Coghlan is careful to locate this personal ethical process within the context of second and third person inquiry. It is persons engaging in the transcendental method of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible that forms the basis for dialogue between human beings. The pursuit of the good is to live with increased authenticity. Coghlan augments his understanding of authenticity by equating it with the Aristotelian concept of *phronēsis*. *Phronēsis* is the virtue of knowing what to do both in general terms and in particular, concrete situations (2013, pp. 343, 347). Defying universalistic notions of ethical discourse he summarises his existential ethics as ascertaining value which "...is the fruit of authenticity and integrates the intellectual, moral and affective dimensions" (2013, p. 349). It is this affective dimension that is pertinent to ART. Echoing the importance Lonergan places upon feelings in his method in theology, Coghlan is convinced that "Feelings play an important role in knowing value" (2013, p. 341). Attending to our affective responses and intending the direction of our affections towards the good is crucial to a transformative ART.

These are sources within PT and AR that have shaped my inquiry. Acknowledging the emotional responses to the inquiry was integral to the emerging story. My role as a 'feeling' researcher with 'feeling' participants-and-co-researchers has been evident throughout the thesis beginning with the fear and bewilderment of the fire walk (*Interlude*, p. 9); feelings of excitement over a spontaneous dialogue following a sermon as well as feelings of distress and regret following three negatively experienced sermons (Chapter 1, Emergence of the research section, p. 11); feeling belittled and vulnerable in the wake of conversations with certain academics (Chapter 1, *Caught between two worlds*, p. 28); feelings of consternation together with weeping which propelled me towards the Ignatian exercises (Chapter 2, *Colours for the ART pallet*, p. 51); participant feelings of apprehension giving way to growing excitement and confidence in the research process (Chapter 3, *Inclusion*, p. 114); the averting of my eyes from the congregation because of my feelings of embarrassment and my fear as a preacher (Chapter 5); and

feelings of the "inner turmoil" I made explicit earlier in this chapter as I analysed my dialogue with the participants centring on wisdom and power.

The story that follows epitomises a storm of emotions experienced by participants and me and the challenges of being a researcher who has strong feelings about what is going on in the inquiry. How is it possible for the researcher to produce findings of any value if s/he is emotionally invested in the field? Again, it is the lurking concern that good research requires objectivity and by implication emotional detachment from those being researched. ART embraces the intermingling of the researcher and participants and the essential experience of feelings within the inquiry. Emotional engagement does not 'contaminate' research so long as the researcher demonstrates self-reflexivity in acknowledging the rawness of felt emotions and being able to stand back and look at these affective reactions in critical way.

A story of the positionality of the 'feeling' preacher and researcher

Indeed, affective awareness as a dimension of the inquiry caused varying levels of disquiet for me and for numbers of participants during the Word Café. During the first Word Café participants were willing to identify being moved by particular aspects of the service (e.g. stories, hymns and the laying on of hands). Yet I noticed that "People did share their difficult experiences but...shied away from expressing feelings" (R, 7.11.2010, p. 7). It appeared to me that people felt uneasy about being specific about their own feelings. There was one exception. A participant spoke of feelings of being angry with God and identified specific reasons for that anger. As the Word Café sessions continued, participants grappled with expressing their feelings and became more confident in doing so (3.07.2011, p. 7).

Resistance to talking about feelings was not unique to our context. My colleague, Richard Cleaves, took great interest in the Word Café process. He asked whether he could explore Word Café events with his congregation at Highbury Congregational Church.[5] He fed back to me the experiences and insights of their events. One aspect of their adaption of Word Café is of particular interest in relation to the role of feelings in the process of inquiry. He reported that after the second session they decided to change the questions and specifically eliminated the

[5] Priory Walk, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL52 6DU, United Kingdom. Website: http://rcbr13861.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/

emotional element. He wrote, "Reluctance to explore 'feelings' is still evident. One of our older people who is widowed commented only a couple of days ago how much she appreciated the Word Café, but had felt it had been good to change the questions - she, preferred in that setting not to be asked to share her feelings" (Correspondence in my PJ, 29.02.2012).

Beyond being aware of how challenging it was for participants to confront and share their affective responses, a key aspect of the inquiry was wrestling with the complexity of my own emotions. It was the preaching event that led into a Word Café on 22 May 2011 which put my emotional engagement into sharp focus. It came as a surprise to me that it was not the mixed response to the sermon that roused my emotions. Instead it was a discussion focussing on the "disruptive" behaviour of the children that provoked an intense response which, at the time, I described as irritation and would now explicitly name as 'anger'.

One Word Café participant was so angry about the behaviour of the children that this person considered walking out. My initial response in my journal was a rather cerebral account of the challenge I faced in reacting emotionally to the feedback of the participants:

> This dialogue about the behaviour of children was particularly significant to me in the way in which it reminded me powerfully of what it is to be an 'involved' researcher. I have emotional responses that range from positive to negative reactions to aspects of the dialogue. What is crucial is that I am aware of my listening skills. Am I listening to other participants? Am I listening to myself? This seems to involve a process of moving from initial reactions to a more detached, considered response. It is vital in this not to rush to the resolution of the tensions. Instead, it is important to acknowledge how we are feeling and to be explicit in our thought processes. It is only when we know our starting point (where we are at present) that we are able to make choices that will help us to move forward in actions that are positive for all (PJ 22.05.2011).

My use of the impersonal 'it' indicates an initial distancing of myself from a visceral reaction. Nonetheless I do express - though in measured tones - what Coghlan (2013, p. 341) regards as the critical "...need to appropriate our feelings in the present tense and to be able to attend to and to understand how they guide our attitudes and behaviour." It was only through the process of critical reflection through the discipline of keeping my journal that I was able to become progressively more attentive to my affective responses in the moment.

It was in a later entry on 25 May that the intensity of my emotional response to the participants in the Word Café pulsed through:

> I have to say I reacted from the 'gut' and said I would rather have a noisy church than one without any children. I know that this came from a 'defensive' part of me. I was deeply irritated that this had been raised at all. This highlights for me the reality that entering into dialogue with the congregation involves the 'real' me. I am not somehow above the fray. I am involved and have feelings about what is being said. What is important is that my responses are not perceived as silencing the voices that need to be heard – however much I dislike them. As N___ said to me later that evening, "You did say you wanted us to say what we thought." And s/he's quite right! (PJ, 25.05.2011)

It would have been much easier to side step the anxiety produced by all this emotion for, as Heen (2005, p. 272) writes, "...when strong feelings are present, they are often overlooked, to make the social interaction go on as smoothly as possible." Yet through this dialogical process in which feelings were put out in the open (at least to some extent) this emotionally charged situation led to specific action that addressed the concerns that were raised. Specifically, an activity table that had been introduced to engage children during the worship was not achieving its intended purpose of age appropriate worship activity. Instead it appeared to be generating a lot of distracting behaviour. It was removed not as a negative or punitive measure but in order to engage the children in worshipping with their families and to involve them proactively in worship (PJ, 22.05.2011).

The strength of the emotional reaction to participant's views was extremely uncomfortable for me. Yet it if it had not been for the intentional commitment to attend to our affections through the Word Café dialogue, the opportunity to discover that a well-intentioned practice was not working and to learn from an emotionally charged experience may not have occurred. I qualify this in that the negative reaction could have been aired in private conversations, brought to the attention of the diaconate, and perhaps to the Church Meeting. Yet this could have taken some time and would not necessarily have involved the kind of immediate face to face encounter. The possibility of Church members suppressing their feelings and not expressing themselves is quite high. It may be that time elapses and the affective response has diminished in urgency. Alternatively, suppressed feelings are held and with time explode in a geyser of emotions.

My affective response which I experienced as anger was possibly augmented by my personal life context of which most participants were unaware. My mother-in-law was unwell and was receiving medical attention which later revealed cancer. Viviane went home to France to visit her mother. On the Thursday prior to the Word Café I confided that "Trying to balance the children and my preparations is a bit of a challenge" added to my reaction to the sermon text (John 10:1-10) which "...simply does not spark with me" (PJ, 18.05.2011). My hope was that a brainstorming session would provide me with "inspiration" for writing. Immediately after the Word Café I described not feeling "quite as focussed" although "...I remained relaxed and was quite pleased with the way I preached the sermon..." which I felt I had "preached from the heart" (PJ, 22.05.2011). After watching the video of the worship service I recall in my journal "...how difficult that morning was - getting the children to church and not having any committed time to reflect and prepare as I normally would... I remember feeling as I went into the church that I was potentially walking into a disaster" (PJ, 6.06.2011). In attempting to make sense of this emotionally fraught preaching event, I was stunned by the contrast between my 'in-the-moment' sense of what happened and my negative emotional impression after watching the video (R, 22 05.2011, p. 16).

The prevailing positivist ideal of objectivity indicates the possibility of being able to be outside of a situation. The natural sciences as well as the traditional social sciences aspire to the idea that the correct research design conducted in laboratory conditions will yield knowledge about the real world. This world view encourages compartmentalisation. There are private and public spheres. In the account I have given of my affective positionality within the inquiry process, the modernist world view would suggest that I have blurred personal and professional boundaries. Some might argue that the true professional would not allow what was happening in family life to transgress into my role as a minister and researcher. I am arguing that all forms of knowledge generation, including the natural sciences, have to involve the whole person. Segregating our lives into compartments has the potential to shut us off from important sources for learning. Emotional awareness is essential to the learning process ranging from the excitement stemming from curiosity to the despair of an insight that eludes us. Our imaginations are fired by our affections.

Heen is keen to make clear her conviction that personal experiences and feelings are tightly bound up in her professional life as a researcher. Citing her

various experiences as a researcher both in using traditional empirical methods and in action research leaves her in no doubt that "Theories as well as professional findings have been interpreted and made sense of in terms of my own experience, and my lived experience has been the basis for models and thinking" (2005, pp. 266-267).

The practice of ART requires taking the risk to attend to affective responses. The impulse to ignore feelings or to smooth over dissonant feelings by the practitioner-researcher has to be resisted. The opportunities for learning are rich when the practical theologian and action researcher practises the disciplines of attention, experiencing affective responses as integral to inquiry itself. It is this self-aware researcher who will be able to model vulnerability to co-inquirers and thus encourage a deepening of relationships.

My story of the 'feeling' preacher-researcher is not neat. Initially, my affective response to some of the dialogue in the Word Café was such that it was difficult for me to acknowledge how strongly I felt. It was only as I followed through with the discipline of hearing participant's voices, keeping a journal, and watching myself on video that I was able to confront the complexity of my emotional involvement. These dialogical disciplines allowed me to gain distance from the immediacy of my subjective experience to perceive the other. This is not a position at which I have arrived but rather a direction towards which I strive. Ladkin (2005, p. 113) maintains that the action research orientation negotiates a boundary between subjectivity and objectivity: "This tension centres around the question of how I can, while holding on to my subjectivity, also put it aside, so that I can be open to the other in a way which enables the other to reveal something of itself to me?" If indeed feelings are the very essence of all human experience, then authenticity involves the activity of knowing my subjective feelings in relation to the affections of the other. A nagging question has resurfaced repeatedly throughout my inquiry. How do I as an involved, feeling researcher demonstrate the rigour of my inquiry? I cannot distance myself from my own practice of preaching nor the relationship I have with my congregation. Ladkin (2005, p. 123) maintains that "Rigour...is constituted by the extent to which we can also account for our located perspective, that is, to the extent that we can simultaneously consider our subjectivity from a 'distance' (or, 'objectively')." In my account of being a feeling preacher-researcher I have demonstrated the move I made from my immediate felt experience and the way

in which I attended to voices of the Other. My subjectivity was experienced objectively through the process of listening to myself and others whilst asking searching critical questions of my affective responses.

CONTINUING ON

The experience of shouting my name before stepping onto glowing embers was more than a daring stunt. It is the story of this inquiry. This has been a journey towards greater authenticity as I have dared to create dialogical space to attend to the inner and outer world. It has been a weaving together of my development spiritually and academically, and as a preacher, action researcher and practical theologian. This has been an account of serendipitous discovery and vulnerability. In this refusal to conclude I have shown self-reflexivity in the dialogue I created and sustained with my congregation. This inquiry has transformed not only the way I preach but the way I relate. I am growing with greater integrity towards being an acting, thinking, and feeling person.

The story is unfinished. This focus on transforming my practice of preaching the Bible with my congregation has engendered a passion for creating dialogical space. Word Café was the way that we chose to create the leisure space for listening conversations. Yet it is the broader concept of ART which has convinced me that there is a need for further explorations of opening communicative space - an ART-ful dialogue. There are two aspects to this. First, I would suggest that within Christian communities there is a thirst for being able to talk about things that matter ranging from practical living to theological ideas. Second, I wonder if there is a missional aspect to ART. What would happen if Christian communities created communicative space in which people were free to gather together to discuss matters of common interest and concern? What if we nurtured open spaces in which we joined with others of good will to nurture wisdom in the service of justice, freedom, transformation and human flourishing?

Hans van Beinum (Quoted in Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 128) wrote that "One moves from practice to practice, and perhaps from practice to 'theory.' In action research one starts in the middle and ends in the middle." So I return to the middle where I began with the conviction that has sustained me: "I step onto the heat of embers to stride towards discovering my name. I do know this: what I already know and what is yet to be discovered is embodied in God who names me.

FINAL WORDS

The inquiry has been collaborative and the dialogue between me and the congregation continues. Fourteen people have read or are in the process of reading the thesis as I submit. The words from the letter and the Word Café Celebration demonstrate engagement with the inquiry process and show that there is an ongoing desire to foster dialogical spaces.

First, I present excerpts from a letter written by a participant after s/he read the thesis (received on the 8 March 2015):

> *As I told you I nearly drowned in the necessary 'academic speech' of Chapter 1... Academics and Lawyers have a language of their own which they jealously guard - power?*
>
> *The remaining chapters became easier to follow - especially the reports on the Word Café. I wonder, if you had realised at the beginning the effect the research on yourself as a preacher would have on you, whether you would still have undertaken such a soul-searching project? I admire your courage... You came across as being totally honest (?) recording and picking up even on your body language.*
>
> *The use of videos made it possible for you to see Jason, the preacher, as your congregation saw you. You were probably harsher on yourself than we were... You were able to get outside yourself and observe all that this stranger was saying and doing - a bit scary! Then to criticise and act on the things you saw was brave; we all love ourselves too much and resent criticism.*
>
> *You made it possible for us to begin to think and speak to each other about our faith and the things that matter. I feel the discussions we have in the Thursday Discussion group spring from Word Café - we no longer feel shy about speaking out and seeking clarification of our inner thoughts and ideas.*

The participant goes on to suggest a dialogue around the practice of and beliefs about baptism.

Second, a Word Café Celebration took place on the 22 March 2015. During the worship service I preached on Luke 24:13-35, highlighting the key themes of the inquiry. The Word Café Celebration focused on the questions as presented in **Table 2**. Twenty one people chose to participate and they identified the following themes

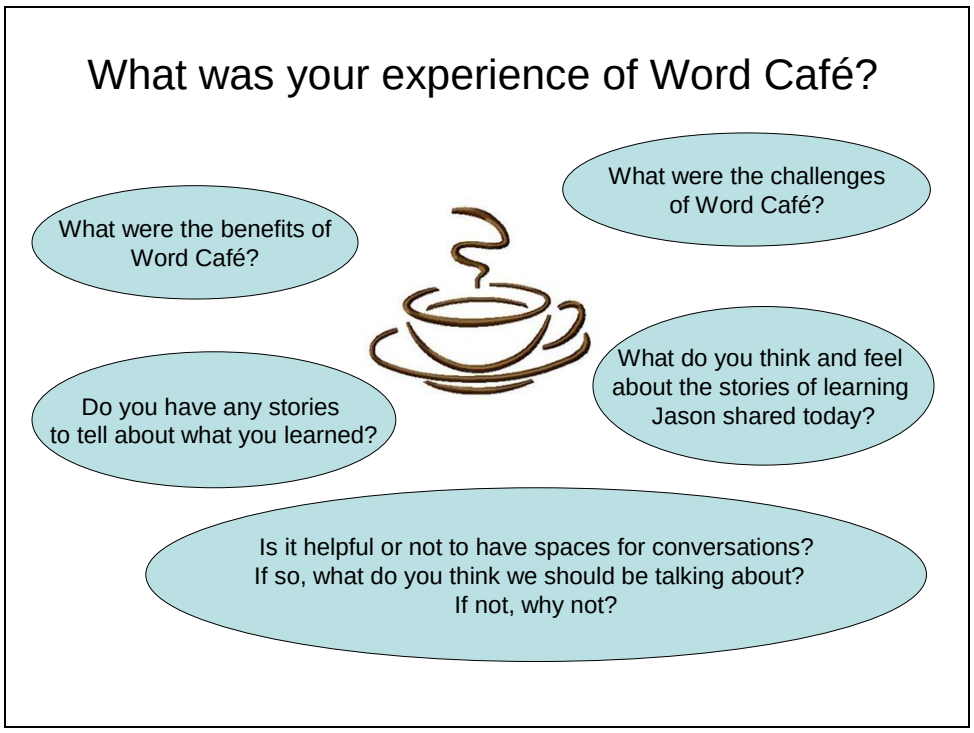

Table 2

which are in bold/italics. The non-bold/italics are related comments from the table cloths:

Vulnerability

Don't always think of the Minister feeling Vulnerable whilst Preaching

Encourage those who do not normally speak to have their say

Have an openion [sic] be able to question the subject of the sermone [sic]

Building up friendship and trust/Friendship with others who share our faith/God is the cen[t]re

Openness/Opportunities to discuss views and feelings freely/Emotions

Comfortable for openness

Issues for discussion

Baptism

Communion

Secular Issues

Election

Spin off Thursday group → *Bring Thursday group discussion into the Church*

Deeper talk and discussion

What about al [sic] café after Church to discuss topics of interest

Knowing Trusting each other

Saturday Praise

Expand

Removing barriers

- inclusivity

- sensitivity

Cross is central to our worship

Worship is <u>Visual</u>

Silence

- Powerful for some

- Difficult for others

- Takes practice

It helps Jason get his PHd!!. [sic]

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